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THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE  
BALLADE, CHAUCER'S MODIFICA-  
TION OF IT, RIME ROYAL, AND  
THE SPENSERIAN STANZA

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF  
ARTS AND SCIENCES OF THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY  
OF AMERICA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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## PREFACE

HOWEVER clumsy it may be to use as title *The Connection between the Ballade, Chaucer's Modification of it, Rime Royal, and the Spenserian Stanza*, this precisely indicates the scope of the investigation, and removes the necessity for a long preface. Within the limits of the discussion the general subject of Chaucer's versification is not raised. That has been treated by ten Brink, Schipper and Kittredge. My concern is with Chaucer's strophe forms (so far, even by Schipper, untreated in detail), not with his metres, save as the two things are inseparable. This dissertation confines itself to the significance of rime royal, its origin in the ballade and its possible influence in the development of the Spenserian stanza.

I propose beginning by surveying the literary background of Medieval Latin, Anglo-Norman, Old French, and Middle-English verse. I shall then examine the history of the ballade, and its forms as Chaucer knew them. The modifying Italian influence upon Chaucer, Chaucer's influence upon his successors, and finally, the connection between rime royal and the Spenserian stanza will be discussed.

The ballade has already been closely examined by Miss Cohen; and Stengel, Jeanroy and Ritter (among others) have investigated its origin; and there has been endless controversy over the Spenserian stanza, as indeed of other questions dealt with here. The discussion of special points has, in some instances, been more complete than it can be in these pages. But nobody until now has attempted to survey this subject as a whole.

My hearty thanks are due to the following: Dr. Arthur Deering, Associate Professor at the University, under whose direction the dissertation was written; to the Reverend Speer Strahan and Dr. Paul J. Ketrick, Instructors in English at the University, for their advice and criticism; and to the Reverend Dr. Peter Guilday, Professor of Church History at the University, Dr. Martin McGuire, Instructor in Greek and Latin at the University, and Mr. Bernard M. Wagner, instructor in English at Georgetown University, for their valuable help on matters related to their fields of scholarship.



## CONTENTS

PREFACE . . . . .	III
I: THE LITERARY BACKGROUND . . . . .	1
II: THE BALLADE . . . . .	37
III: CHAUCER AND THE BALLADE . . . . .	49
IV: THE ITALIAN INFLUENCE UPON CHAUCER. . . . .	64
V: THE CHAUCERIAN STANZA OR RIME ROYAL . . . . .	83
VI: CHAUCER'S INFLUENCE UPON HIS SUCCESSORS . . . . .	93
VII: THE FORMATION OF THE SPENSERIAN STANZA . . . . .	107
SUMMARY . . . . .	128
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	132





## CHAPTER I

### THE LITERARY BACKGROUND

IT IS clearly impossible to consider in detail all the various influences that operated through centuries to form the versification Chaucer built upon. They have, therefore, to be considered in an extremely summary fashion. A bare outline, and little more, can be given concerning the main trends of Medieval Latin, Old French and Middle English verse before Chaucer. Disputed matters must be avoided, and what is presented must lead as definitely as possible to the central point.

#### I

##### MEDIEVAL LATIN

As Raby points out, "When Latin Christian poetry really began in the West, the main literary influence could hardly fail to be that of the Latin Classical poets."<sup>1</sup> And as Miss Waddell subjoins, "There is no beginning, this side the classics, to a history of mediaeval Latin, its roots take hold too firmly on the kingdoms of the dead. The scholar's lyric of the twelfth century seems as new a miracle as the first coccus, but its earth is the leafdrift of centuries of forgotten scholarship."<sup>2</sup> And, if this is not enough, Allen may be brought in. "Latin poetry," he writes, "is the starting-point of any investigation of medieval Provençal and French lyrics."<sup>3</sup>

Though in studying the Medieval Latin poets we must always bear in mind the Classical Latin poets, it is well to remember that the Middle Ages only developed what had always been implicit in Latin—one might almost say that they liberated the genius that had been imprisoned.

Since Ennius Latin verse had had a certain artificiality imposed upon it, the old Saturnian meter being replaced by the Homeric hexameter. Several generations were needed before the lesson was

<sup>1</sup> Raby, Frederic James Edward, *A History of Christian-Latin Poetry* (Oxford, 1927), p. 4. He adds "Until we arrive at the sixth and seventh centuries, we shall hardly find a Christian poet who does not owe his training entirely to the grammarians and rhetoricians" (p. 7). The same author's *History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages* was announced for publication while this study was in the press.

<sup>2</sup> Waddell, Helen, *The Wandering Scholars* (London, 1927), p. ix.

<sup>3</sup> Allen, Philip Schuyler, *Medieval Latin Lyrics* (Chicago, 1931), p. 253.

thoroughly learned, and perfection achieved by Virgil. But though Latin verse eventually came to wear its bonds with a natural air, the bonds themselves were never really natural. Popular verse of a sort very different from that practised by cultivated literary men continued to be composed—marching chants and fescennine songs.<sup>4</sup>

We may reasonably infer that an immense quantity of such verse was composed, rough, riotous and often obscene, though, since very little of it was ever written down, only scraps of it have been preserved. We may infer, too, that such songs had a considerable part in shaping the later vernacular poetry.

The social changes that occurred in the Empire after the Barbarian invasions made inevitable the gradual loosening of bonds that had always been somewhat artificial. The literary language had long been different not only from the *sermo plebeius* but even from the *sermo cotidianus*, the colloquial speech of the upper classes of society. When, therefore, the old aristocratic order broke down, as Raby points out, everything favored the revival of the vulgar speech.

The new rich, the new official class, the swarms of provincials who invaded Rome, had more use for the practical speech of every day than for a literary language which had to be painfully learned in the school of the grammarian. Shut up in the schools, and a prey to the dwindling class of *littérateurs*, the learned language in the age of Marcus Aurelius dragged on an artificial life.<sup>5</sup>

In such a society it was natural enough that the Christian poets should conserve as much as possible of the old culture which to all the men of the time seemed to be the embodiment of the old social stability. They had received their training in the schools of rhetoric.<sup>6</sup> But even while conserving as much of the literary standards of the past as was destined to endure, they were also responsive to the new forces that were to sweep away all that was outworn. The Church found a method of utilizing the classic literature, in so far as it could be utilized, and yet at the same time of responding to the demand for a more popular form of expression.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 117, and Garrod, Heathcote Williams, *The Oxford Book of Latin Verse* (Oxford, 1921), p. x.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. St. Basil's advice to young men to study pagan literature. Migne, J.-P., *Patrologia Graeca*, xxxi, col. 564-589.

A compromise was effected between the quantitative and the accentual principles. We see this exemplified in the hymns which began to be written in Latin, in the *Aeterne rerum conditor* and the *Splendor paternae gloriae* of St. Ambrose (c. 340-397), in the *Hymnum dicat turba fratrum* of St. Hilary of Poitiers (300-367), the *Carmen paschale* of Sedulius (of the early fifth century) and the *Ales diei nuntius* of Prudentius (349-410).<sup>7</sup>

Now and then we get from these, and their contemporaries, a little rhyme. But when we get it we see that it has forced its way in as something that was not to be denied, not as something that has been sought for; though when it fails to appear we feel that it ought to be there, that these hymns are trembling in expectancy of its arrival. Miss Waddell says of Prudentius, "Ambrose was before him in rhythm, Hilary in rhyme."<sup>8</sup> But indeed Ambrose has rhyme as well as rhythm, if the *Jesu, corona virginum* is really his.

Te deprecamur, largius  
Nostris adauge mentibus  
Nescire prorsus omnia  
Corruptionis vulnera.<sup>9</sup>

Rhyme is to be found all through the poem; but at the conclusion it swings out triumphantly, not to be denied.

Rhyme, however, had always been more or less incipient in Latin verse.<sup>10</sup> It may be found occasionally, not only in later things like

<sup>7</sup> As Blume says of St. Ambrose: "He observes the rules of quantity, but chooses a popular metre, the iambic dimeter, with its regular succession of accented and unaccented syllables, from which arises the so-called alternating rhythm which marks the human step and pulse and is, therefore, the most natural and popular rhythm. He usually avoids a conflict between the word accent and the verse accent; his quantitative hymns can therefore be read rhythmically." Art. on "Hymnody and Hymnology" in *Catholic Encyclopaedia* (New York, 1910), VII, 598, col. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Phillimore, John Swinnerton, *The Hundred Best Latin Hymns* (London and Glasgow, 1926), p. 9. In this little book, which may be bought for a shilling, that brilliantly gifted and lamented scholar has distilled the essence of the many-volumed *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, ed. by Dreves, G. M., Blume, C., Bannister, H. M., Leipzig, 1886-1922.

<sup>10</sup> "Wir erkennen, dass der Hang zur Verknüpfung von Versteilen oder ganzen Versen durch gleichklingende Silben potentiell . . . überall vorhanden ist, dass es sich mithin nur darum handelt, ob, wann, in welchem Umfang und durch welche Einflüsse er aktuell geworden ist." Norden, Eduard, *Die antike Kunstprosa* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1923), II, 811.

the poem the Emperor Hadrian is credited with having written on his death-bed, but in Lucretius and Horace. Take this from the *Ars Poetica*:

Non satis est pulchra esse poemata; dulcia sunt  
et quocumque volent animum auditoris agunto.<sup>11</sup>

If it is there it must be—in the case of so very careful a craftsman as Horace—not merely because in a language so rich in rhyme as Latin it forced its presence, but because Horace was prepared to accept it, for the enrichment bestowed. But what he surreptitiously admitted, the Christian poets who wrote in Latin in the later Middle Ages openly accepted.<sup>12</sup>

But before they accepted rhyme they accepted the popular un-literary rhythms. Venantius Fortunatus (530-609) is a case in point. He did not always use rhyme,<sup>13</sup> but how boldly he used the doggerel marching-verse of the legions!

Ecce Caesar nunc triumphat qui subegit Gallias

or

Mille Francos mille semel Sarmatas occidimus

is turned by Venantius Fortunatus into

Pange, lingua, gloriosi proelium certaminis,

which St. Thomas Aquinas was to use as the model and base of a still more famous hymn.

This raises, of course, the question of the origin of rhyme. Learned disputations have raged over it, most of which have ignored the obvious fact that rhyme is natural to man.<sup>14</sup> It is found

<sup>11</sup> Fairclough, H. Rushton, *Horace, Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica* (London 1926), 99-100.

<sup>12</sup> Taylor, too, makes the point: "Christian emotion quivers differently from any movement of the spirit in classic measures. The new quiver, the new shudder, the utter terror, and the utter love appear in mediaeval rhymed accentual poetry." Taylor, Henry Osborn, *The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1901), p. 246.

<sup>13</sup> But note from his *Vexilla Regis prodeunt*:

Arbor decora et fulgida,  
Ornata Regis purpura,  
Electa digno stipite  
Tam sancta membra tangere.

—J. S. Phillimore, *The Hundred Best Latin Hymns*, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Norden, E., *Die antike Kunstprosa*, II, 868-869.

everywhere. When it appeared in European literature, the appearance was spontaneous and more or less simultaneous everywhere. As Lanz remarks: "We cannot lay hand on one particular literary document and say: here is the origin of rime. . . . Rime lies so deep in human nature and in human language that it is as little worth while to discuss the origin of rime as that of dancing or singing."<sup>15</sup>

The claim for the origin of rhyme has been confidently advanced for the Irish.<sup>16</sup> That in the seventh century they did much in the development of Latin verse is common knowledge. But in such fragments of Irish verse as exist written before that time we do not find any rhyme, though we do find the Irish ear responsive to something that is not assonance, as we understand the term, but an assonance of harmony rather than of identity of consonants.<sup>17</sup> The quick-witted Gaels seized upon whatever suggestions were fumblingly offered by the Latin verse they encountered when they came into contact with the continent in the seventh century.<sup>18</sup>

In Latin poetry written by Irishmen rhyming is often extremely artificial, so artificial as to be fantastic, as may be seen in the *Hisperica Famina*,<sup>19</sup> but its artificiality (and its fantasticality) was brought about by the union of Classical and Gaelic culture. The Irishman had an ear for rhyme, but a more sensitive ear for rhythm, as may be discovered even by reading those Irish poets of

<sup>15</sup> Lanz, Henry, *The Physical Basis of Rime* (Palo Alto, Calif., 1931), pp. 105-106.

<sup>16</sup> The strongest champion, or at least the boldest, has been George Sigerson. See his lecture on Irish Literature in *The Revival of Irish Literature* (London, 1894), pp. 61-114; *The Easter Song of Sedulius* (Dublin and London, 1922), pp. 1-47; and *Bards of the Gael and Gail* (London, 1897), pp. 4-45.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Raby, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Analecta Hymnica*, II, 263.

<sup>19</sup> This, however, is an exceptional case, and too much should not be made of "this strange example of perverted ingenuity." (Laistner, M.L.W., *Thought and Letters in Western Europe, A.D. 500-900*, New York, 1931, p. 105). Cf. Jenkinson, Francis John Henry, *The Hisperica Famina*, (Cambridge, 1908), pp. ix-xxxix, and Manitius, Max, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1911), I, 156-158. Edward Kennard Rand, in "The Irish Flavor of *Hisperica Famina*" (included by Stach, Walter, and Walther, Hans, in *Studien zur lateinischen Dichtung des Mittelalters* (Dresden, 1931), says: "The writers of 'free verse' had far to go before reaching the freedom of the Middle Ages and, in particular, the unbridled freedom of this extraordinary diction. For while these modern poets had freed themselves from the shackles of verse, punctuation, and, to some extent, syntax, they were still under the tyranny of the word, whereas Irish exuberance in the early Middle Ages needed a new Latin" (p. 141).

our own time who write in the Gaelic tradition, and even more by reading those who wrote in Gaelic during the seventeenth century.<sup>20</sup>

Yet we must question some of the things Sigerson claims with beguiling eloquence. It is no doubt broadly true that "rhyme was quite unknown to all the dialects of Europe, with one exception, for some centuries after the Christian era."<sup>21</sup> And there may be some truth in the contention that Gaelic poetry "introduces into Latin verse the use of returning words, or burthens, with variations, which supply the vital germs of the rondeau and the ballade."<sup>22</sup> And no doubt "the term Rime to modern or foreign ears, most faintly, most inadequately, indicates the marvellously refined and intricate methods of interwoven sounds which they created, not the mere repetition of a sound, but the reiteration of portions of a sound and semi-similar, semi-dissimilar sound, so that in a verse, you shall hear in rime fundamental tones and over-tones, full notes and faint, shadowy, suggestive, and elusive echoes which nothing resembles, which can be likened to nothing, if not to the sounds which the hidden bugle calls from the mountains around Killarney when on a still evening the echoes roll, recede, swell, faint, and die away in exquisite aerial melody."<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless the certain fact is that rhyme appeared in Latin poetry long before the Irish inundated the Continent with their piety, persiflage, and sometimes their imperfectly subdued paganism. They wrote hymns, but among them were poets more renowned for their drinking songs. To their credit it must be said that though they complained of the beer they had to drink in Gaul, their conduct was more respectable than that of many clerics of the time. Yet we can now and then catch in their verses a note similar to that which was later to characterize the Goliards. In the great schools of Clonard, Clonfert, Clonmacnoise, Bangor, Lismore, Hy and Armagh classic learning was preserved during troubled times when letters could not be practised elsewhere in the West. From Ireland the art of verse was carried back to Europe during the Carolingian Age; and with it came much of the Gaelic spirit, the Gaelic aptitude for literary expression, and the Gaelic readiness to use rhyme. "A certain new

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Corkery, Daniel, *The Hidden Ireland* (Dublin, 1925), pp. 59-60.

<sup>21</sup> Sigerson, G., "Irish Literature," in *The Revival of Irish Literature*, p. 77.

<sup>22</sup> Sigerson, G., *Bards of the Gael and Gall*, p. 407.

<sup>23</sup> Sigerson, G., *The Easter Song of Sedulius*, p. 260.

note," writes Allen, "we shall later observe in Carolingian poetry had its source in the specifically Gaelic contribution of Irish monks and minstrels, and could not reasonably be traced to any other origin extraneous to Carolingian France."<sup>24</sup> Miss Waddell notes, "There is no rhyme in such primitive Irish verse as remains. But once crossed with the Latin genius, Irish rhyme becomes as intricate and subtle as the designs of the *Book of Kells*."<sup>25</sup>

All through the early, and to some extent through the later, Middle Ages we may discern two main types of Latin verse; that which imitated the classic forms and was known as *versus*, and that which was popular and intended to be sung and was known as *modulus*.<sup>26</sup> Allen makes four classifications: those of the antique meters, liturgical poems, lyric survivals, and popularizing Latin lyrics.<sup>27</sup> But for our purpose the two types indicated will suffice. Our present concern is with the *modulus* rather than the *versus*. Indeed even the poems of the classical revival of the fourth and fifth centuries Allen has justly labelled "masquerade."<sup>28</sup>

This popular verse, as Gaston Paris says,<sup>29</sup> had always existed among the Romans, but, though despised during the days of classic literature, under Christianity it found an opportunity never possessed before.<sup>30</sup> The hymn, in establishing it, also gave an impetus to secular song.

But Allen attempts to put the liturgical poems in much the same category as the *versus*—opposing to them the popular lyric. He returns to this several times, saying, "On the Continent of Europe the Romish Church and culture had brought about the neglect of vernacular poetry and its utter submergence beneath an anti-national crust."<sup>31</sup> The use of the term "Romish" at once indicates to a "Romanist" a certain hostility.

<sup>24</sup> Allen, P. S., *The Romanesque Lyric* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1928), p. 179.

<sup>25</sup> Waddell, H., *The Wandering Scholars*, p. 57.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Symonds, John Addington, *Wine, Women and Song* (London, 1928), pp. 11, 17-18.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Allen, P. S., *Medieval Latin Lyrics*, pp. 199-201.

<sup>28</sup> *The Romanesque Lyric*, p. 103.

<sup>29</sup> Paris, Gaston, "Lettre à M. Léon Gautier sur la versification latine rythmique," *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes*, 27<sup>e</sup> année (1866), tome II de la 6<sup>e</sup> série, pp. 578-610.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Blume, Clemens, art. on "Hymnody and Hymnology" in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, 597, col. 2.



For all that the contention may be sound enough, and I am not concerned to dispute it. But it should be pointed out that Allen himself makes many statements which go to contradict this one. For instance, he writes:

A rainy afternoon spent in thumbing through the more than fifty volumes of the *Analecta Hymnica* will prove our contention most amply. [The contention here, of course, is not the one presented above.] For in a large number of cases—I should even say in a majority of them—nothing but the title of a religious poem, with an occasional casual reference to a holy name or spot, indicates to the reader whether an earthly object and aim animates the author, or a profane one. The manner and imagery of popular secular poetry are here, and there is often slight difference in language between the songs in honor of saints and of pilgrimages to their tombs and the flowery, if simple, rhetoric used by earthly poets in addressing more mundane targets of their devotion.<sup>32</sup>

On his own showing the hymns and the popular lyrics are cast in a very similar mould. Indeed it has often been urged (for instance by Symonds) that "ecclesiastical poetry took the lead in creating and popularizing new established forms of verse."<sup>33</sup> The vernacular poetry grew out of this, for as Miss Waddell puts it, "One thing at least is beyond controversy, that Latin was the schoolmaster of both the Romance and the German tongues."<sup>34</sup> If Latin was used, it was not because the Church frowned upon any use of the vernacular, but because the modern languages in process of development had as yet hardly sufficient plasticity to compete with Latin. The process may be indicated as follows: the hymns of the Church adapted the method of popular song to liturgical purposes; this brought about a further development of popular song; and this led on to the emergence of the vernaculars. As Raby says: "Just as the new forms of rime and rhythm proved to be by far the most adequate vehicles for the expression of the higher religious emotion of the Middle Ages, so too, the typically human

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<sup>31</sup> *Medieval Latin Lyrics*, p. 140. In his earlier book (*The Romanesque Lyric*, p. 174.) he said the same thing, but not quite so definitely. "On the continent of Europe the Romish church and culture had tended to bring about the neglect of vernacular poetry and its utter submergence beneath an anti-national gloze."

<sup>32</sup> *Medieval Latin Lyrics*, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> *Wine, Women and Song*, p. 19.

<sup>34</sup> *The Wandering Scholars*, p. 215.

feelings which are common to the popular poetry of all times had to clothe themselves in the same dress."<sup>35</sup>

At this point some mention should be made of the sequence. "The new principle that the poet should find for himself his own verse scheme and melody," says Strecker, "is to be traced to music, especially liturgical music."<sup>36</sup> He goes on to remind us that it was in France that the idea first arose of furnishing texts for the wordless melodies of the Gradual of the Mass which were connected with the Alleluia, and that these texts had to be of a most varied character in order to correspond with the manifold changing sequence of tones. And since these melodies were sung by alternating choirs, the second of which occasionally repeated a fixed series of tones of the first, the result was that each two portions of the text had to have the same number of syllables and cola. The result was that the so-called "Later Sequence" finally became completely untrue to the principle of free invention of form, and became bound instead by the laws of rhythmical poetry.<sup>37</sup>

The new principle, while it greatly aided the development of ecclesiastical sequence poetry, had a profound effect also upon secular verse. If one goes through the four enormous volumes of the *Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*,<sup>38</sup> one very rarely finds originality either in content or form. There are hymns upon the Ambrosian model, mechanical imitations of classical hexameters, now and then a set of sapphics, but much of the work consists of the dull dreary ingenuity of *abecedaria*.

But the sequences gave secular as well as religious verse a wide range of new forms. Strecker cites in proof of the influence of the sequence *The Cambridge Songs*.<sup>39</sup> He points out that a book of sequences forms the beginning of this collection, and that the contents of these sequences are in part of a worldly and even prankish character.<sup>40</sup>

The same thing may be seen, still more widely and richly exemplified, in the *Carmina Burana*.<sup>41</sup> Here, too, is the strongly

<sup>35</sup> *A History of Christian-Latin Poetry*, p. 296.

<sup>36</sup> Strecker, Karl, *Einführung in das Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1929), p. 34.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35. <sup>38</sup> Included in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*.

<sup>39</sup> Breul, Karl, *The Cambridge Songs*, Cambridge, 1915.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Strecker, K., *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>41</sup> Schmeller, Johann Andreas, *Carmina Burana*, 2d ed., Breslau, 1883. A new edi-

marked influence of hymn and sequence. But a wealth of new forms appears. Many of these are fantastic and trifling,<sup>42</sup> but with the eager spirit of youthful experimentation. The Goliards show that they are reaching out to new things, as in

Amaris stupens casibus  
vox exultationis  
organa in salicibus  
suspendit Babylonis;  
captiva est confusionis  
involuta doloribus  
Sion cantica leta sonis  
permutavit flebilibus.<sup>43</sup>

And in a very different vein we have

Dum iuventus floruit,  
licuit et libuit  
facere, quod placuit,  
iuxta voluntatem  
currere, peragere  
carnis voluptatem;<sup>44</sup>

and

Vite perdit  
me legi  
subdideram,  
minus licite  
dum fregi,  
quod voveram;  
sed ad vite vesperam  
corrigendum legi,  
quicquid ante perperam  
puerilis egi.<sup>45</sup>

And the *Gaudeamus igitur* stanza, with minor variations, often appears.

In Fortune solio  
sederam elatus,  
prosperitatis vario  
flore coronatus;

---

tion (edited by Alfons Hilka and Otto Schumann) is now in course of publication. Of the two volumes so far published (Heidelberg, 1930), the first contains Nos. 1-54 of the songs, the second a commentary.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Hilka, A., and Schumann, O., *Carmina Burana*, Vol. I, Nos. 5, 22, 53.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 30.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 31.

quicquid enim florui  
 felix et beatus,  
 nunc a summo corrui  
 gloria privatus.<sup>46</sup>

It is clearly exemplified, even in these citations from the songs of the sons of Golias, that they drew upon other things than the hymns of the Church, though they derived much from that source.<sup>47</sup>

Gaelic metres are to be found in them, as in that rollicking drinking-song, "The Monk of Angers:"

Andecavis       abas esse dicitur  
 Ille nomen       primi tenet hominum;  
 Hunc fatentur   vinum vellet bibere  
 Super omnes     Andechavis homines.  
 Eia eia eia laudes,  
 Eia laudes dicamus Libero.<sup>48</sup>

Of this Miss Waddell says, "No language can be so gravely impish as medieval Latin, and the clerks saw it early."<sup>49</sup>

Because they saw it, they did something besides casting their songs in the same pattern as the hymns; they often parodied hymns.<sup>50</sup> The temptation to do so was strong. The forms they were using suggested to their minds the idea of travesty religious poems composed in an identical pattern.<sup>51</sup>

Yet some of these parodies may well have been written by pious men indignant about ecclesiastical corruption. "Golias might be an Episcopus or Pontifex without reproach," writes Hanford. "There is scandal . . . but it does not redound upon the head of their supposed author. Golias is . . . the apostle of decency or at least the scourge of vice, and the odium of gulosity is transferred from himself to the objects of his wrath."<sup>52</sup> And the various *Ave*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 16.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Wehrle, William O., *The Macaronic Hymn Tradition in Medieval English Literature* (Catholic Univ. diss., Washington, 1933), pp. 25-27.

<sup>48</sup> *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, Vol. IV, ed. Karl Strecker (Berlin, 1923), p. 591.

<sup>49</sup> Waddell, Helen, *Mediaeval Latin Lyrics*, (London, 1921), p. 321.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Lehmann, Paul, *Die Parodie im Mittelalter* (Munich, 1922), p. 63.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Symonds, J. A., *Wine, Women and Song*, p. 33; Hilka A., and Schumann, O., *Carmina Burana*, I, 86; and Lehmann, P., *Die Parodie im Mittelalter*, pp. 8-12, 70.

<sup>52</sup> Hanford, James Holly, "The Progenitors of Golias," *Speculum*, I (1926), p. 41.

drinking-songs may have had no other design than giving entertainment to monks who might have legitimately taken from them innocent merriment.

And when satire was the motive of the parody, it was by no means invariably directed against the corruptions of the clergy, as may be seen in the specimens gathered by Wright.

Vexilla regni prodeunt,  
fulget cometa comitum,  
Comes dico Lancastriac  
qui domuit indomitum;  
Quo vulneratus pestifer  
mucronibus Walensium,  
Truncatus est atrociter  
in sexto mense mensium.  
Impleta sunt quae censuit  
auctoritas sublimium;  
Mors Petri sero patuit,—  
regnavit diu nimium.<sup>53</sup>

Another, also written against the detested Piers Gaveston, begins:

Pange, lingua, necem Petri qui turbavit Angliam,  
Quem rex amans super omnem praelulit Cornubiam;  
Vult hinc comes, et non Petrus, dici per superbiam.  
Gens est regni de thesauri fraude facta condolens,  
Quando Petrus de thesauro prodige fit insolens,  
Quid ventura sibi dies pariat non recolens.<sup>54</sup>

But though a large proportion of the goliardic songs which have come down to us are satirical, they contain many that are serious, and some that are even devout. The great collection contained in a Benedictbeuern MS. and published under the title of *Carmina*

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The famous Goliard who wrote under the name of "the Primate" we know to have been a canon of Orleans (cf. Allen, P. S., *Medieval Latin Lyrics*, p. 26, and Haskins, Charles Homer, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, [Cambridge, Mass., 1927] p. 158). The Primate is known to have been in the entourage of Reginald von Darsell, Archbishop of Cologne and Chancellor to Frederick Barbarossa. (Cf. Waddell, Helen, *Medieval Latin Lyrics*, pp. 338-340. Cf. also Hanford, J. H., *loc. cit.* pp. 38-58, and Haskins, C. H., *op. cit.* p. 178.)

<sup>53</sup> Wright, Thomas, *The Political Songs of England from the Reign of John to that of Edward II*, revised by Edmund Goldsmid (Edinburgh, 1884), IV, 43.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 45.

*Burana*,<sup>56</sup> contains love-songs, drinking-songs, begging-songs, songs in praise of the mythical "order," and a Drunkards' Mass. But here, as in *The Cambridge Songs*, we get, along with all the rowdiness and obscenity, things of high poetic value, songs in which we feel, as Allen phrases it, "the thud and beat of irresistible vernaculars."<sup>56</sup> But whether it be in

Levis exsurgit Zephyrus  
et sol procedit tepidus,  
iam terra sinus aperit,  
dulcore suo diffluit,<sup>57</sup>

or

Dira vi amoris terror,  
et venereo axe vehor,  
'igne' ferventi suffocatus.  
Deme, pia, cruciatus<sup>58</sup>

we get the hymn pattern applied to a profane purpose. So that Gaselee can say:

They derive their *form* from the Christian hymn (itself founded on the late Latin lyric, touched by Eastern influence) . . . and their *substance* from the Song of Songs and the nature-lyrics of the vernaculars, Ovid supervening later on. A curious descent—Ovid and the Shulamite, St. Ambrose and Erato; but this I think is their surprising genesis.<sup>59</sup>

Yet Allen holds the view that "the really vital inspiration and the specific flavor which render the goliard lyrics noteworthy are distinct and self-evolved. They are a premature effort made by presumably a very limited class to achieve at a single leap what was laboriously wrought out by whole nations in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries."<sup>60</sup> One may question the "self-evolved," ex-

<sup>56</sup> Schmeller, J. A., *Carmina Burana*, 2d edition, Breslau, 1883. "The collections which contain religious songs," writes Dreves, "offer material of every sort in many-colored confusion: liturgical and non-liturgical, sacred and profane, edifying and unedifying, not to say scandalous" Dreves, C., *Analecta Hymnica*, xx, 7.

<sup>56</sup> *The Romanesque Lyric*, p. 86.

<sup>57</sup> Breul, K., *The Cambridge Songs*, p. 21. But the typographical arrangement and spelling are those given in H. Waddell's *Wandering Scholars* (p. 228).

<sup>58</sup> Schmeller, J. A., *Carmina Burana*, No. 158.

<sup>59</sup> Gaselee, Stephen, *The Transition from the Late Latin Lyric to the Medieval Love Poem* (Cambridge, 1931), p. 33

<sup>60</sup> *Medieval Latin Lyrics*, p. 251.

cept in the sense that everywhere song needs primarily its own impulse to come into being. But it was curious how the goliard effort faded away. "Not the least singular fact about it," writes Symonds, "is that though the *Carmina Vagorum* continued to be appreciated, they were neither imitated nor developed to any definite extent after the period I have indicated [the end of the thirteenth century.]"<sup>61</sup> "Too precocious, too complete within too narrow limits, it was doomed to sterility"<sup>62</sup>—is that the explanation of the goliard decay? Or can we account for it, as Miss Waddell does, on the ground that the patience of the Church was exhausted and that she degraded these scholars from their clerical status?<sup>63</sup>

That ecclesiastical condemnation was a severe blow to the Goliards need not be contested. But the Council of Chalons in the middle of the seventh century had condemned the progenitors of the Goliards, and one council after another directed its attention against vagabond clerks. But Verneuil in 844, Meaux in 845, and Pavia five years later thundered in vain.<sup>64</sup> Why did the Goliards, so much more numerous, and bound together in a loose brotherhood, succumb so easily? The suggestion I offer—one that I do not profess to be able to prove—is this: the work of the Goliards was done. Latin had been used because it was almost the only medium of literary expression that sufficed.<sup>65</sup> But with the dawn of the thirteenth century the European vernaculars were coming into their own. After that a man tended more and more to write in his native tongue; or rather he could now sing in it. That he could do so was largely a result of the work done by the Goliards.

Moreover, the Renaissance was imminent in Italy. With it came a greater interest in classical Latin. Eventually it resulted in a contempt for all popular Latin verse. At about the same time Latin hymns achieved their greatest height. Abelard died in 1142, Adam of St. Victor in 1180, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure in 1274, Thomas of Celano, the reputed author of the *Dies Irae*, in

<sup>61</sup> *Wine, Women and Song*, p. 195.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194. Allen quotes Symonds almost verbatim, though without using quotation marks. *Medieval Latin Lyrics*, p. 251.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *The Wandering Scholars*, p. 186.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Mansi, Giovanni Domenico, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florentiae, 1764), x, col. 1190-1194, xiv, col. 830-832.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Haskins, C. H., *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, p. 127.

1250, and Jacopone da Todi, the reputed author of the *Stabat Mater*, in 1304.<sup>66</sup> If with the end of the thirteenth century the day of the Goliards was over, so also was the day of liturgical hymns. And each would seem to have closed for the same reason: the day of vernacular poetry had already dawned.<sup>67</sup>

One other matter demands to be touched on here: Latin verse in England. To the Goliards Chaucer—though no doubt he owed much more to them than he imagined—has but a single reference. It occurs in the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, and is in his description, far from complimentary, of the Miller:

He was a janglere and a goliardeys.<sup>68</sup>

Whether Chaucer knew the works of the Goliards or not, and how-ever great may be his indirect and unconscious debt to them, his direct debt (as far as Latin is concerned) is to the classic poets, to Ovid, Virgil and Statius.<sup>69</sup> In them he found the mythology and the matter of ancient romance he could use; and though there was no longer any question of direct imitation, he could nourish his own vernacular art upon these models.<sup>70</sup>

Latin verse had a long history in England. The Venerable Bede, writing in the early eighth century, was the author of a *De Arte Metrica*.<sup>71</sup> In the bibliography of his own works appended to his *Ecclesiastical History* he mentions that he wrote a *Librum hymnorum diverso metro sive rhythmo* and also a book of epigrams in heroic and elegiac verse. Of Bede's hymns, Dreves prints sixteen that he considers genuine (though the collection as a whole has not been preserved) in the *Analecta Hymnica*.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>66</sup> It is, of course, unlikely that Jacopone da Todi was the author of this great poem. In this connection cf. Underhill, Evelyn, *Jacopone da Todi* (London, 1919), pp. 202-204, and Raby, *op. cit.*, pp. 438-439.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Zawart, Anscar, "History of Classical Education in the Church," in *The Classics, Their History and Present Status in Education*, ed. by Kirsch, Felix M. (Milwaukee, 1928), p. 108, and Haskins, C. H., *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>68</sup> *The Canterbury Tales*, A. 560. I have used the Skeat text for all quotations from Chaucer.

<sup>69</sup> In this connection cf. Shannon, Edgar Finley, *Chaucer and the Roman Poets*, Cambridge, Mass., 1929; Lounsbury, Thomas R., *Studies in Chaucer* (New York, 1892), II, 249-288; and Wise, Boyd Ashby, *The Influence of Statius upon Chaucer*, Baltimore, 1911.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Haskins, C. H., *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>71</sup> Migne, J.-P., *Patrologia Latina*, XC, col. 149-176.

<sup>72</sup> L, 98-116.



We have, too, Bede's hexameter poem on St. Cuthbert. The verses are correct, and show that Bede had read his Sedulius to good purpose.<sup>73</sup> And as Miss Waddell remarks he showed "an appreciation of the new system of accent rather than of quantity very rare in a classical scholar, even in the sixteenth century."<sup>74</sup>

The same thing may be seen in Bede's hymn on the Holy Innocents, and, because of the nature of the work, a couple of its stanzas may be put on exhibition:

Hymnum canentes martyrum  
Dicamus innocentium,  
Quos terra flentes perdidit,  
Gaudens sed aethra suscipit,

Vultum patris per saecula  
Quorum tuentur angeli  
Eiusque laudant gratiam  
Hymnum canentes martyrum.<sup>75</sup>

The tendency towards rhyme is clearly visible, as is also a curious but very charming refrain.

Allen suggests that the Anglian monk and scop had learned from the Irish,<sup>76</sup> and this may well be, but St. Augustine's successor, St. Theodore, a Greek of Tarsus, established schools in England, and with him came Hadrian, an African by birth, who had studied in Athens. So that Bede could write: "Even to this day some of their scholars yet living have as good knowledge of the Latin and Greek tongues as of their own in which they were born."<sup>77</sup>

Others of these early Anglo-Saxon poets who wrote in Latin are Aldhelm (640?-709), Boniface (680-755), and Wulfstan, who lived and worked at the opening of the eleventh century. But as Raby has pointed out the early promise of Latin literature in England fell into a decline which lasted until the Norman Conquest.<sup>78</sup> This was

<sup>73</sup> Migne, J.-P., *Patrologia Latina*, xciv, col. 575-595.

<sup>74</sup> *The Wandering Scholars*, p. 38. But she justly adds that he was greater as a critic than a craftsman. Of his scholarship Cardinal Gasquet has written in his essay "St. Bede" in *The Mission of St. Augustine* (London, 1924), pp. 32-51.

<sup>75</sup> Dreves, G. M., Blume, C., and Banister, H. M., *Analecta Hymnica*, I, 102.

<sup>76</sup> *Medieval Latin Lyrics*, p. 140.

<sup>77</sup> King, John Edward, *Baedae Opera Historica* (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1930), II, 11.

<sup>78</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 151.

probably due to the fact that vernacular literature got an early foothold in England, and was less influenced than elsewhere by Latin, which was cultivated by the Anglo-Saxons as a form of literature altogether unrelated to their own.

After the coming of the Normans, however, Latin got a new foothold. It was the universal language of the court, of law, and of affairs.<sup>79</sup> In literature, too, it was for a long time almost the only means of expression. Godfrey, who was prior of St. Swithin's at Winchester and who died in 1107, left a number of epigrams much in the style of Martial; Lawrence of Durham, who died in 1154, in his *Hypognosticon* translated nine books of the Bible into elegiacs; Reginald of Canterbury, who died *ca.* 1109, left an epic in leonine hexameters on the hermit Malchus; and another hexameter poem, *De Bello Trojano*, was composed by Joseph of Exeter, who wrote towards the end of the twelfth century. Around Theobald, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1139-62), was gathered a brilliant circle that included John of Salisbury, Thomas à Becket and Roger de Pont l'Évêque. John Peckham (d. 1292), another future Archbishop, the author of the *Philomena*, and John Garland, who flourished during the early quarter of the thirteenth century, continued the tradition of English Latin liturgical verse which lasted until Walter Wiburn, a Franciscan of the fourteenth century.<sup>80</sup>

But the great glory of England in the matter of liturgical song, if Raby is correct, is Stephen Langton, whose claim he argues for the *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*.<sup>81</sup> But Phillimore inclines to King Robert<sup>82</sup> and the editors of the *Analecta Hymnica* hesitate between the claims of Pope Innocent III and Stephen Langton.<sup>83</sup>

A last word on the medieval Latin rhetoricians—or at least on the one to whom Chaucer makes a famous reference, Geoffrey de

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Haskins, C. H., *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Raby, F. J. E., *op. cit.*, pp. 332-344, 385-389, 455. Other poets that might be mentioned are Alexander Neckham and John of Hoveden.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Raby, F. J. E., *op. cit.*, p. 343. Weight is added to this argument by the fact that Father Herbert Thurston, S. J., who is one of the most learned and rigorous of all critics in his field, has supported the claim in an article in the *Month* for June 1913, pp. 602-616.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Phillimore, J. S., *The Hundred Best Latin Hymns*, p. 38.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. LIV, 237-238.

Vinsauf. He, like the John Garland mentioned above,<sup>84</sup> was the author of a treatise on poetry. Garland need not detain us. But we might glance in the direction of Geoffrey who wrote at the dawn of the thirteenth century. Chaucer salutes him ironically:

O Gaufred, dere mayster soverayn,  
That, whan thy worthy king Richard was slayn  
With shot, compleynedest his deth so sore,  
Why ne hadde I now thy sentence and thy lore,  
The Friday for to chyde, as diden ye?<sup>85</sup>

The rhetorical rules are all set out for us in the 2116 lines of the *Poetria Nova*<sup>86</sup> in careful but wooden hexameters, that contain much good advice, nearly all of which is quite beside the point.<sup>87</sup> The treatise had no doubt been dinned into young Chaucer's head, and even from a dull man he must have learned something, though, being a genius, he learned things (or came to divine them) which had never entered his "dere mayster's" head.

## II

### ANGLO-SAXON AND MIDDLE ENGLISH VERSE BEFORE CHAUCER

Concerning Anglo-Saxon verse it is possible to be very brief. For though the subject has a high importance, it has practically no bearing upon the work of Chaucer. As Courthope says:

In the poems of the Anglo-Saxons the general reader finds an expression of the mind of a nation cut off from the long tradition of civilisation almost as completely as the Britons before they were brought under the Roman Empire; a language still in its inflected stage, and hardly more intelligible to him than Russian or Sanscrit; and a metrical system, prevailing, doubtless, in the forests of Germany long before the days of Arminius, but which, even in Chaucer's time, had almost fallen into disuse. On the other hand, in the *Canterbury Tales*, he is in the presence of ideas and sentiments common to that western Christendom which, since the end of the eleventh century, had shown itself capable of concerted action; he reads, with comparatively little difficulty, a language so

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Faral, Edmond, *Les Arts Poétiques du XII<sup>e</sup> et du XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Paris, 1924), pp. 40-47, 378-380.

<sup>85</sup> *Nun's Priest's Tale*, 527-531.

<sup>86</sup> Faral, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-262

<sup>87</sup> But some of it is not very good, as when he recommends the artificial order in favor of the natural, as being the more elegant. *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

completely transformed from its ancient state that its direct descent from the Anglo-Saxon can be barely recognized <sup>88</sup>

Exception may be taken to the emphasis of some of Courthope's statements. There was a notable vernacular poetry in England earlier than anywhere else in Europe (unless perhaps in Ireland), exemplified by Caedmon (fl. 670) and Cynewulf (fl. 750), and in *Beowulf* and *The Seafarer*; and within three or four generations after the landing of St. Augustine in 597 the Anglo-Saxons were producing scholars in abundance.

But because of the character of their language, and because they had their own system of prosody, the Anglo-Saxon poets were able to keep their native tongue and Latin in completely distinct compartments. As we have seen, Bede, Aldhelm and others wrote Latin verse and showed, in doing so, a remarkable understanding both of the classical and the new accentual prosody.

While rhyme may occasionally be found in Anglo-Saxon verse, as for example in the "Rhyming Poem" of the *Exeter Book*, and even in *Beowulf* (where it occurs as the end rhyme of two hemistichs);<sup>89</sup> and though something like stanza form exists in *Deor* and other poems,<sup>90</sup> we correctly think, of Anglo-Saxon as using a very different system. This was based structurally upon alliteration, with a middle pause so strong as to be more than ordinary caesura, and with accent and equivalence. The line itself—a very long line—was the metrical unit.<sup>91</sup>

But Anglo-Saxon poetry rapidly declined, and even when, under Alfred the Great, there was a literary movement, it mainly produced prose works. "Except for a few stray poems, like the fine narrative of the *Death of Byrhtnoth* and the *Battle of Brunanburh*, it might be supposed that the art of the scop had disappeared from the life of the Anglo-Saxon race."<sup>92</sup>

With the Norman Conquest and its terrific impact upon the life of England, Anglo-Saxon literature, especially in verse, virtually disappeared. As Haskins puts it: "England became a part of

<sup>88</sup> Courthope, William John, *A History of English Poetry* (London, 1926), I, 4

<sup>89</sup> Klaeber, Friedrich, *Beowulf* (New York, 1922), 1014, 3172.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Schipper, Jakob, *A History of English Versification* (Oxford, 1910), pp 62-63

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Saintsbury, George, *A History of English Prosody* (London, 1923), I, 14.

<sup>92</sup> Courthope, W. J., *op cit*, I, 83.

France and thus entered fully into the life of the world to which France belonged."<sup>93</sup>

Even before the Conquest French culture had effected a deep mark upon the upper ranks of Anglo-Saxon society.<sup>94</sup> But after the Conquest every important office in Church and State was occupied by a Norman, and the Anglo-Saxons were as a body reduced to vassalage. "It is true," writes Visiting, "that some Englishmen entered [the religious orders] but they were few, and it is doubtful whether they used any other language than that of their French brethren."<sup>95</sup> Indeed, so completely triumphant was the French language that a royal charter of 1233 explains that the terms of English law (which had been retained) had to be translated into French in order to make them intelligible to all.<sup>96</sup> And for literature, as for all official records, French and Latin amply sufficed. The speeches in Parliament were all in French, and though English was used for the first time at the opening of Parliament in 1363, we find French being used again as late as 1377;<sup>97</sup> and in the Upper House it lasted much later.<sup>98</sup> In 1386 English was first used in petitions, but not until 1450 was this regularly done.<sup>99</sup>

Visiting, who has given us a detailed catalogue of works in Anglo-Norman,<sup>100</sup> shows that nearly all of its lyric poetry was religious.<sup>101</sup> It was in romance, *lai* and *fabliau*, that this poetry was most rich. And this of course is just what one would expect in a literature which had borrowed its forms from France.

Among the romances we have, beginning toward the end of the twelfth century, the *Tristan* of Thomas (not the author of *Horn*),<sup>102</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Haskins, Charles Homer, *The Normans in European History* (Boston and New York, 1915), p. 82.

<sup>94</sup> Visiting, Johan, *Anglo-Norman Language and Literature* (London, 1923), p. 8.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. Cf. Studer, Paul, *The Study of Anglo-Norman* (Oxford, 1920), p. 11.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Thommerel, J. P., *Recherches sur la fusion du franc-normand et de l'anglo-saxon* (Paris, 1841), p. 20.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Stubbs, W., *Constitutional History of England* (4th ed., Oxford, 1896), II, 434.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Visiting, J., *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Schofield, William Henry, *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer* (New York, 1906), p. 111.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Visiting, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-78.

<sup>101</sup> "Lyric poetry, other than religious, hardly exists in Anglo-Norman literature," *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>102</sup> Bédier, Joseph, *Le roman de Tristan par Thomas* (Société des anciens textes français), 1902-5.

*Horn*,<sup>103</sup> *La Folie Tristan*<sup>104</sup> and *Estoire du saint Graal* by Robert de Borron or Boron.<sup>105</sup> During the thirteenth century appeared *Guy de Warwick* (which is still unpublished except in extracts), *Boeve de Haumtone*,<sup>106</sup> and *Fouke Fitz Warin*,<sup>107</sup> which latter, though in prose, bears indications of having previously been written in verse.

Among the *lais* are *Havelok* (belonging to the early twelfth century),<sup>108</sup> *Lai du corn* by Robert Biket<sup>109</sup> and those of Marie de France.<sup>110</sup>

The most famous of the chronicles are those by Wace (the *Roman de Rou et des Ducs de Normandie*,<sup>111</sup> and *Le Roman de Brut*)<sup>112</sup> and *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*.<sup>113</sup>

It is not possible to list here more than a few of such works, and Anglo-Norman literature contained in addition rhymed saints' lives, satires such as the *Riote du Monde*,<sup>114</sup> and specimens of the drama, among which may be mentioned *Le Mystère d'Adam*.<sup>115</sup>

But despite all this abundant literature, changes, about a hundred years after the Conquest, began to appear that more and more differentiated the French written in England from the French written in France. Yet, as Vising says, it is difficult to fix distinct periods for the evolution of Anglo-Norman.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Brede, Rudolf, and Stengel, Edmund, *Das anglonormanische Lied vom Wackern Ritter Horn*, Marburg, 1883.

<sup>104</sup> Bédier, Joseph, *Les deux poèmes de La folie Tristan*, Société des anciens textes français, 1907.

<sup>105</sup> Nitze, William A., *Le roman de l'Estoire du Graal*, Paris, 1927.

<sup>106</sup> Stimming, Albert, *Der anglonormanische Boeve de Haumtone*, Halle, 1899.

<sup>107</sup> Brandin, Louis, *Fouke Fitz Warin*, Paris, 1930.

<sup>108</sup> Wright, Thomas, in *Metrical Chronicle of Geoffrey Gaimar*, Caxton Society, 1850.

<sup>109</sup> Michel, Francisque, in F. Wolf's *Über die Lais* (Heidelberg, 1841), pp. 327-341.

<sup>110</sup> Warnke, Karl, *Die Lais de Marie de France*, Halle, 1900.

<sup>111</sup> Andresen, Hugo, *Maître Wace's Roman de Rou et des Ducs de Normandie*, Heilbronn, 2 vols., 1877-79.

<sup>112</sup> Le Roux de Lincy, Antoine Jean Victor, *Le Roman de Brut*, 2 vols., Paris, 1836-38.

<sup>113</sup> Meyer, Paul, *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, Société de l'histoire de France, 3 vols., 1891-1901.

<sup>114</sup> Ulrich, J., *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, VIII (1884), 275-289.

<sup>115</sup> Studer, Paul, *Le Mystère d'Adam*, Manchester, 1918.

<sup>116</sup> *Op. cit.*, "The individualism of the authors is too great, and their command of

Factors were at work that made this inevitable. Anglo-Saxon must early have begun its process of infiltration. And while the loss of Normandy brought many Normans to England it also served to accentuate English nationalism.<sup>117</sup> This feeling was strengthened by the civil war against Henry III, which, though led by the Frenchman Simon de Montfort, was backed very largely by the townsfolk, who were to a great extent Anglo-Saxon in origin.<sup>118</sup>

Moreover, most of the poets who were Anglo-Saxon in blood, even those who belonged to the clergy, had little learning, and, adds Vising, "What they possessed least of all was system and theory. Most of them did not know English or knew it only imperfectly, and at the same time they found no little difficulty, as they themselves admit, in handling the French language and French versification."<sup>119</sup>

In the reign of Edward II we see French, and French mingled with Latin, used freely in satire, which meant that such a medium would have the widest popular appeal. Of this the *Song against the King's Taxes* may be taken as an illustration:

Diey, roy de magesté, ob personas trinas,  
Nostre roy e sa meyné ne perire sinas;  
Grantz mals ly fist aver gravesque ruinas,  
Celi qe ly fist passer parties transmarinas.  
Rex ut salvetur, falsis maledictio detur!

Roy ne doit à feore de gere extra regnum ire,  
For si la commune de sa terre velint consentire:  
Par tresoun voit honme sovent quam plures perire;  
A quy en fier seurement nemo potest scire.  
Non eat ex regno rex sine consilio.<sup>120</sup>

But when we come to the *Cursor Mundi*, a Northumbrian poem of the early fourteenth century, we have a poem not merely that is written in English, but, as the author confesses, written in English

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the language is too unequal," p. 32. Cf. also Paris, G., *Mélanges de littérature française du moyen âge* (Paris, 1912), pp. 71-105.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Freeman, Edward Augustus, *History of the Norman Conquest* (London, 1879), v, 703.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Vising, J., *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>120</sup> Wright, Thomas, *The Political Songs of England, from the reign of John to that of Edward II*, revised by Edmund Goldsmid (Edinburgh, 1884), III, 30.

in order to be understood.<sup>121</sup> It is worth knowing, however, that the author uses "Frankis rimes" for the same reason, or perhaps he does not know how to manage the old Anglo-Saxon prosodical system.

In to Inglis tong to rede  
 For the loue of Inglis lede,  
 Inglis lede of England,  
 For the *commun* at understand.  
 Frankis rimes here I redd,  
 Comunlik in ilk[a] sted,  
 Mast es it wroght for *frankis* man:  
 Quat is for him na *frankis* can?  
 Of Ingland the nacion,  
 Es Inglis man þar in *commun*;  
 þe speche þat man wit mast may spede,  
 Mast þar-wit to speke war nede;  
 Selden was for ani chance  
 Praised Inglis tong in france;  
 Giue we ilkan þare language  
 Me think we do þam non outrage.<sup>122</sup>

All this was from the start inevitable. It would be idle to speculate what would have happened to Anglo-Saxon versification had French not been introduced and made dominant in England. For that is what actually occurred. As has been noted, even before this contact Anglo-Saxon showed some tendency towards stanza and rhyme, and we might legitimately suppose that such a tendency would have grown stronger of its own accord.

In Middle English rhyme can be found at a very early date. The *Canute Song*, for instance, was composed long before the twelfth century was out:

Merie sungen muneches binnen Ely  
 Tha Cnut chyning reu ther by;  
 Roweth, cnihtes, noer the land  
 And here we thes muneches sang.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>121</sup> But cf. White, Robert Meadows, and Holt, Robert, *The Ormulum*, Oxford, 1878. In this poem, written at the very end of the twelfth century, the Dedication makes the same point.

<sup>122</sup> *Cursor Mundi*, 233-248, ed. Morris, Richard, Early English Text Society (Nos. 57, 59, 62, 66, 68, 99, and 101), 3 vols., 1874-1893.

<sup>123</sup> Gale, Thomas, *Historiae Britannicae, Saxonicae, Anglo-Danicae Scriptores* (Oxoniae, 1691), 505. The version used here is the one, with two small changes, given by ten Brink, B., *History of English Literature* (London, 1895), I, 148.



If there is assonance there as well as rhyme, the same is true of much of the French of the time, whether written in France or England. But often the rhyme rings clear as in the fragment by St. Godric, who died in 1170:

Sainte Marie, Christes bur,  
Maidenes clenhad, moderes flur  
Dilie min sinne, rix in min mod  
Bring me to winne with the selfd God;<sup>124</sup>

and in the Paternoster of the twelfth century:

Vre feder þet in heouene is,  
þet is al soð ful iwis.  
weo moten to þeos weordes iseon.  
þet to liue and to saule gode beon.  
þet weo beon swa his sunes iborene.  
þet he beo feder and we him icorene.  
þet we don alle his ibeden.  
and his wille for to reden.<sup>125</sup>

That Latin had a good deal to do with the verse forms used by the earliest poets writing in English is highly probable, if not absolutely certain. Yet, as Lewis points out, most of the Latin influence is indirect.<sup>126</sup>

Because of the historical circumstances already noted, and because of the literary influence brought to bear upon Anglo-Saxon, but also perhaps because of the nature of the language itself, especially after it had fused with Latin and French to become English, forms other than those of Anglo-Saxon prosody crystallized in our literature. Yet because of a certain reaction against French, there arose a strong, though largely confused, tendency in the fourteenth century to try to recover the older system of versification. It is to be seen in the *Ormulum*, the *Cursor Mundi*, the *Moral Ode* and Layamon's *Brut*. In all of them—with the exception of the *Cursor*—we can see the poets struggling to retain the old prosody,

<sup>124</sup> From *MS. Reg. v. F. Fol. 85* (B.M.), and in George Saintsbury's *History of English Prosody*, I, 30.

<sup>125</sup> Morris, Richard, *Old English Homilies* (Early English Text Society, 1868), I, 55.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Lewis, Charlton Miner, *The Foreign Sources of Modern English Versification* (New York, 1898), pp. 63-64, and Sisam, Kenneth, *Fourteenth Century Prose and Verse* (Oxford, 1921), pp. xiii-xv.

while the new continues to keep the upper hand. As Saintsbury says of Layamon (fl. 1200):

The author of the *Brut* is like a teetotum staggering against different objects in his way. It is to me, after reading him over and over again, distinctly uncertain whether he meant to write old alliterative verse and was unable to do so, or whether he meant to write new octosyllabic couplets and was unable to do so, in either case with continuous regularity.<sup>127</sup>

Some lines are purely alliterative; others use rhyme; still others use both rhyme and alliteration.

A more determined, or at any rate a more skillful, attempt was made by Langland and others to revive Anglo-Saxon prosody. And it is curious that this should have occurred just the moment before Chaucer was about to make all such things self-evidently obsolete. There was not, and in the nature of things there could not be, any attempt to revive the Anglo-Saxon language which had found its medium in alliterative verse. Yet Langland's prosody was clearly a very different thing from the prosody of *Beowulf*, or of Caedmon and Cynewulf.<sup>128</sup> Though the poet addresses himself to the mass of common men, he has an evident desire to be archaic, for only thus can he dissociate his writings from the courtly tradition derived by other English poets from the French. Yet despite his striving after the old versification, he shows how he himself, like all the men of his time, had the new (yet now no longer new) versification beating in his blood. The last essays in alliteration—even though one was made by a man of Langland's genius (or perhaps because of that very reason)—serve to indicate how completely moribund the Anglo-Saxon system had become, and had long been.

Nevertheless even after Chaucer we find verse that bases itself upon the old alliterative principle (with a difference). Thus at the beginning of the fourteenth century appeared a number of poems, so strongly alliterative as to retain alliteration as a structural principle, and yet cast into a thirteen-line stanza with end-rhyme.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>127</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, 181. Cf. Courthope, W. J., *op. cit.*, I, 124.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Saintsbury, G., *op. cit.*, I, 49. And again (p. 79). "The differences . . . of English verse of 1000 and English verse of 1300 are differences of nature and kind; the differences of English verse in 1300 and 1900 are mere differences of practice and accomplishment."

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Ketrick, Paul J., *The Relation of Gologros and Gawane to the Old French Perceval* (Catholic Univ. diss., Washington, D. C., 1931), pp. 30-33.

Luick lists over a dozen poems of this kind.<sup>130</sup> Among these may be mentioned *Golagros and Gawane*, *The Buke of the Howlat*, the *Aventyrs off Arthure* and *Rauf Coilyear*. As Tonndorf has remarked of *Golagros and Gawane*, "In the first seventy-five strophes . . . there are only five 'long lines' without alliteration."<sup>131</sup> All of which would show that, despite the use of rhyme (the new principle), alliteration (the old principle) was holding much of its ground.

Even so accomplished a technician as Dunbar (1465?-1530?) turns to it, though he is correctly classed amongst the "Scottish Chaucerians," as in his racy *The Tua Maryit Wemen and the Wedo*. But this was for a special reason: the poet wishes to tell us what he has overheard in a conversation that is anything but elegant. It cannot be denied that the method employed is highly effective, and offers a strong contrast to the polished, elaborate, glittering verse that Dunbar writes elsewhere.

Chaucer himself was aware of the rhetorical value of the alliterative device, though he dismisses the system somewhat curtly in his sole allusion to it as "Rum, ram, ruf."<sup>132</sup> But his incidental use of alliteration is a different matter. In this way, as ten Brink has shown<sup>133</sup> it was used by Chaucer with subtle effect, as in

And whiche they weren, and of what degree.<sup>134</sup>

But more commonly Chaucer employs the device for his battle descriptions, in which, though he could hardly have had in mind the Anglo-Saxon tradition, he shows that he had unconsciously absorbed as much of it as he needed for his purpose, for the reason that he was so responsive to the genius of the English language. An example of this is the line

Ther stomblen stedes stronge, and doun goth al<sup>135</sup> ↓

which gets from alliteration all that can be got.

It might be worth noting that these effects are generally to be

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Luick, Karl, "Englische Metrik" in Hermann Paul's *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie* (Strassburg, 1905), II, 169.

<sup>131</sup> Tonndorf, Max, *Rauf Coilyear* (Halle, 1893), p. 19.

<sup>132</sup> *The Parson's Prologue*, 42

<sup>133</sup> Ten Brink, B., *The Language and Metre of Chaucer* (2d ed., revised by Friedrich Kluge, London, 1901), pp. 246-248.

<sup>134</sup> *Canterbury Tales*, *Prologue*, 40.

<sup>135</sup> *Knight's Tale*, 1755.

found in his heroic line, the octosyllabic couplet being hardly robust enough to sustain such weight. Which is to say that it was after Chaucer had perfected his art, after he had learned from France (and later Italy) all that he was going to learn, that he instinctively permitted himself to incorporate the element that gave the older poetry its strength. It is impossible to imagine Chaucer using<sup>136</sup> a prosody similar to that of Langland. The belated triumph of *Piers Plowman* was the flaring up of the candle of alliterative poetry at the instant before the flame died. The genius of English poetry demanded something else, and that it got in the work of Chaucer.

## III

## FRENCH POETRY BEFORE CHAUCER

French poetry written in England has been briefly surveyed in the preceding pages. To the succeeding chapter will be deferred a consideration of the French writers of Ballades. A summary of what lies between these two points is now to be given.

It can largely be accounted for on the ground of the orderliness of the French mind, but must also be due in part to the orderliness of the French cultural development, that all of the historians of French literature are able to use much the same pattern for the arrangement of their material. Petit de Julleville,<sup>136</sup> like Lanson<sup>137</sup> and Bossuat,<sup>138</sup> is able to divide it into the primitive literature, which had as its main fruit the lives of saints; the chivalric literature (into which category fall the *chansons de geste*, the romances, the crusading songs, the chronicles, such as those of Villehardouin and Joinville, and courtly lyric poetry); the bourgeois literature (including the *fabliaux* and the *Roman de Renart*, the new personal and popular lyricism, exemplified by Bodel, Adan de la Hale and Rutebeuf); dramatic literature; and the literature of allegory and satire, which has its apogee in the *Roman de la Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. With this—though there is much not to be brought into any of these classifications—the literature of

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Petit de Julleville, Louis, *Histoire de la langue et de la littérature française*, 8 vols., Paris, 1896-99.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. Lanson, Gustave, *Histoire de la littérature française* (20<sup>e</sup> éd., Paris, 1912), pp. 19-140.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Bossuat, Robert, *Le moyen âge* (Paris, 1931), pp. 49-268.

France is accounted for to the opening of the fourteenth century.

The great period of the *chanson de geste* was the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>139</sup> Of this period the greatest of the epics is the *Chanson de Roland*, which in its present form belongs to the late eleventh century. This, like the other *chansons*, *Aliscans*, *Raoul de Cambrai*, *Girard de Roussillon*, and *Les Saisnes*, are written in heroic decasyllabics. The lines are grouped together, in bundles as it were, in what are called *laisses*, in which assonance is employed, but is freely mixed with monorime. This is worth remembering in connection with Chaucer's use of the heroic line in English. It is not difficult to see how he might have derived the idea of couplets (at least in part) from the same source.

The cycles of the crusade, such as the *Chanson d'Antioche*, the *Chevalier au Cygne*, *Godefroi de Bouillon* and the *Chanson de Jerusalem*, being heroic, have much the same pattern.<sup>140</sup>

But when we come to the romances we find a considerable contrast between them and the *chansons de geste* in subject, style, feeling and form. These are the products of a later and a more refined age; and where the *chansons* were written to celebrate the deeds of warriors and rarely contain women characters, the romances represent their knights as the servitors of their mistresses or animated by mystical sentiments. Accordingly appealing to a wider and a different public, poems such as the *Queste del Saint Graal*, *Merlin*, *Lancelot du Lac* and *Tristan* supplanted the *chansons de geste* in popular favor.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Bédier, Joseph, *Les légendes épiques*, 4 vols., Paris, 1914-21, and Bossuat, R., *Le moyen âge*, pp. 50-78, especially the bibliography given in the same work (pp. 76-78). Bédier offers the following conclusions: (1) that no text has been discovered of the first ballads supposed to be the sources; (2) the historic facts in our *chansons de geste* are inexact and exaggerated: it is difficult, therefore, to believe that they arose at the time of the events which they celebrate; (3) the *chansons de geste* interpret a state of soul, a profound and simple faith, and the courage of the twelfth century; (4) they accord with local legends. Many churches on the routes of pilgrimage boasted the tombs or the relics of the heroes who sang the *chansons de geste*. We may therefore be permitted to conclude that the priests and monks, with the assistance of jongleurs, composed the epics in order to amuse or edify the pilgrims, the soldiers and the merchants who stopped at the monasteries. The existing texts of the *chansons de geste* support this theory, for they exhibit conscious art.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Bossuat, R., *op. cit.*, pp. 66-69, and Paris, G., *Mélanges de littérature française du moyen âge*, pp. 109-168.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Paris, Gaston, *Mélanges de littérature française du moyen âge*, pp. 229-327;

The greatest name connected with the romances is that of Chrétien de Troyes, to whom are attributed not only the *Tristan*,<sup>142</sup> but the *Chevalier au Lion* (*Yvain*), *Cligès*, *Erec* and *Perceval*. We should note that the authors of the romances, except in the instances where they wrote in prose, turned away from the rough *laisses* of the *chansons de geste* to employ the more graceful if less powerful octosyllabic couplet.

If this was true of the *Matière de Bretagne*, those who concerned themselves with the *Matière de Rome* (by which was understood the subject of antiquity, so as to include both Greece and Rome) sometimes used the form of the *chansons de geste* and sometimes the lighter form of the Arthurian romances.<sup>143</sup>

Among the most original and diversified of the literary products of early French literature are the *fabliaux*, of which a hundred and fifty specimens are known. Here we come into contact with ordinary human life, and in them the all-important thing is the story, which is always ingenious and amusing, though not always edifying. They contain in germ the *Decameron*, the *Heptameron*, and many of the *Canterbury Tales*.<sup>144</sup> Again we should note the form, which is always that of the octosyllabic couplet.<sup>145</sup>

Faral, Edmond, *Recherches sur les sources latines des contes et romans courtois*, Paris, 1913; Schürr, M. F., *Das altfranzösische Epos*, Munich, 1926; and Bossuat, R., *op. cit.*, pp. 83-119.

<sup>142</sup> Chrétien de Troyes' MS. has been lost. Robert de Borron and Thomas dealt with that romance, and we have only fragments of Thomas' version.

<sup>143</sup> Paris, Gaston (*Mélanges de littérature française du moyen âge*, p. 267), points out: "Chrétien n'est pas le créateur de la poésie narrative en octosyllabes accouplés; il a eu, pour cette forme poétique, des prédécesseurs qu'il a connus et parfois imités: les auteurs de *Thèbes*, d'*Énéas*, de *Troie*, d'*Apoloine*, ceux des petits poèmes sur *Narcissus* et *Piramus* . . . il a eu des contemporains qui l'ont presque égalé en renommée et dont plusieurs pourraient lui disputer le premier rang: les auteurs de *Partenopeu* et de *Floire et Blanchefleur*, Gautier d'Arras, Huon de Rotelande, Guiot de Provins et d'autres."

<sup>144</sup> Cf. the *Miller's Tale*, the *Shipman's Tale*, the *Pardoner's Tale*, the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, the *Summoner's Tale*, part of the *Merchant's Tale* and the *Manciple's Tale*.

<sup>145</sup> The chief work on the *fabliaux* is Joseph Bédier's *Les Fabliaux, études de littérature populaire et d'histoire littéraire du moyen âge*, 4<sup>e</sup> éd., Paris, 1925. Cf. review by Ch.-M. des Granges, *Romania*, xxiv (1895), 135-142; Brunetière, Ferdinand, in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1 Sept., 1893; and Faral, Edmond, "Le fabliau latin au moyen âge," *Romania*, I (1924), 321-385.

Akin in spirit and form to the *fabliaux*, but supplying the direct satire in which they are usually lacking, is that remarkable poem, or rather series of poems, which goes under the title of *Le Roman de Renart*.<sup>146</sup> Here, in a collection that amounts to nearly 100,000 lines, contributed by various hands at various periods (twelfth and thirteenth centuries), we get animal tales that comment slyly, but with universal applicability, upon the follies and vices of mankind and constitute also a satire on the *geste*. Unity is achieved through the characters of the *loup* and the *goupil*. Though not borrowing directly from the *Roman de Renart*, it is clear that Chaucer in making his own contribution to the legend was inspired by it.<sup>147</sup>

It is perhaps too much for Lanson to say, "Le Français n'est pas lyrique,"<sup>148</sup> for early French lyric poetry is both abundant and beautiful. But it is true that by comparison with other French achievements in poetry of the time it suffers to some extent. Yet it has many varieties of matter and form—such as the *chansons à personnages*, *chansons d'histoire*, *chansons dramatiques*, *chansons de danse*, *chansons de toile*, *pastourelles*, *chansons d'aube*, *chansons courtoises*, *jeux-partis*, to say nothing of religious lyrics—that make it valuable for its own sake, and still more valuable as the origin of a later lyric poetry.<sup>149</sup>

While the poets of Northern France (the *trouvères*) were devoting themselves mainly to epic and romance, the Provençal poets (the *troubadours*) devoted themselves to that lyricism which came so easily and naturally to the *langue d'oc*. Aubry insists upon the connection, often ignored, between this poetry and the music to which it was sung, which together made up the popular song.<sup>150</sup> Of this music he gives us some samples.

These songs of spring, of work, of love, or the accompaniment

<sup>146</sup> Martin, Ernest, *Le Roman de Renart*, 3 vols., Strasbourg and Paris 1881-1887. Cf. also Foulet, Lucien, *Le Roman de Renart*, Paris, 1914; and Paris, Gaston, *Mélanges de littérature française du moyen âge*, pp. 337-423.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. *Oxford Chaucer*, III, 431-433, VI, c, and Petersen, Kate O., *On the Sources of the Nonne Prestes Tale*, Boston, 1898.

<sup>148</sup> *Histoire de la littérature française* (20<sup>e</sup> éd.) p. 82

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Jeanroy, Alfred, *Les Origines de la poésie lyrique en France au moyen âge*, 2<sup>e</sup> éd., Paris, 1904; Paris, Gaston, *Mélanges de littérature française du moyen âge*, pp. 473-624; and Bossuat, R., *Le moyen âge*, pp. 121-139.

<sup>150</sup> Aubry, Pierre, *Trouvères and Troubadours*, translated by Claude Aveling (New York and London, 1914), pp. 12, 13.

of the dance, were adopted by the poets of the North. By the marriage of Elinor of Aquitaine (the grand-daughter of the famous troubadour and crusader, Duke William IX) to Louis VII the finesse of the South was carried to the courtly circles of the North, and the taste for Provençal lyric poetry inspired the work of the trouvères.<sup>151</sup> In this Thibaut of Champagne (1201-53), King of Navarre, must be given much of the credit. His ancestry was of both south and north, and he had possessions in both parts of France. While he employed only the French language, he used it to express the sentiments and the forms of the *langue d'oc*. As Bossuat puts it: "Aux trouvères septentrionaux qui se mouvaient alors dans un monde conventionnel et se contentaient d'exprimer des sentiments élémentaires, les troubadours ont enseigné le secret de l'analyse intérieure."<sup>152</sup> From being a popular and anonymous art it became in the hands of the troubadours and of the trouvères (who continued their work) an art courtly and complicated, yet retaining the original lyric note, until this tended to become lost in too great an artificiality.

A large part of this lyrical poetry is anonymous, as is the case with every literature in its early stages. But, in addition to the name of Thibaut, must be mentioned those of Conon de Béthune (d. 1224), Audefroi le Bâtard, Blondel de Nesle, Gace Brulé (d. 1220), Colin Muset (thirteenth century), Adan de la Hale (1235-1288), Jean Bodel (d. 1207), Rutebeuf (d. 1280), and Marie de France (late twelfth century), of whom Courthope has said, "She may be described without exaggeration as the founder of the art of poetry both in France and England."<sup>153</sup>

One other work, and one of the highest importance, must be

<sup>151</sup> It should also be remembered that the association of men of Northern and Southern France in the Crusades must have aided the same process. Cf. Bossuat, R., *op. cit.*, p. 130. But it should be added that while much was taken from the troubadours, there were also many native Northern types, sometimes dissimilar, sometimes remarkably similar to the forms of the *langue d'oc*. Cf. Voretzsch, Karl, *Introduction to the Study of Old French Literature* (New York, 1931), pp. 142, 147, 155.

<sup>152</sup> Bossuat, R., *op. cit.*, p. 130. And Paul Meyer writes: "Le mérite des Provençaux est d'avoir introduit dans le monde roman l'idée d'une poésie élevée par la pensée, distinguée par la forme, capable de satisfaire les esprits supérieurs, et cependant s'exprimant non en latin, mais en langue vulgaire." "De l'influence des Troubadours sur la poésie des peuples romans," *Romania*, v (1876), p. 266.

<sup>153</sup> *A History of English Poetry*, I, 122.



mentioned. This is the *Roman de la Rose*.<sup>154</sup> Begun in the early part of the thirteenth century (about 1237) by Guillaume de Lorris, who wrote 4700 lines, it was completed forty years later by Jean de Meun (d. 1305), who brought it up to 22,800 lines. The first part is an allegorical dream poem, which is charming in spite of its redundancy and confusion. Jean de Meun's part in the poem was written in a very different and contradictory spirit, and represents most of the characteristics of the later middle ages, with mysticism side by side with satire, a naïve acceptance of the unascertained and even the impossible, science united to mordant criticism of social conditions. Where the first part may be described as "courtly," the contribution of Jean de Meun is "gaulois" in its idea of women, in its attacks upon the religious orders, particularly the Dominicans, and its critical attitude towards the highly placed.

The mark it made upon the time can hardly be overestimated. As Wright says, "The influence of the *Roman de la Rose* was probably the greatest single force brought to bear upon the writers of the last two centuries of the Middle Ages."<sup>155</sup> And its influence did not end with the Middle Ages.

It was the translation of this poem which was Chaucer's chief work of his early literary career. And in Englishing its octosyllabic couplets he sharpened his own art, and mastered the form that was to be used for much of his own poetry. It is not necessary here to enter upon a discussion as to which part (or whether any part) of the existing English translation is by him. What we know is that he did make a translation, for he tells us so himself.<sup>156</sup> And in practically everything he wrote its influence may be discerned.

Concerning the influence of the *Roman de la Rose* upon Chaucer Sandras has written:

C'est au point que ce poëte, qui sentait les beautés de la nature, qui savait les peindre, se content souvent dans ses descriptions

<sup>154</sup> Langlois, Ernest, *Le Roman de la Rose, par Guillaume de Lorris et Jean de Meun*, Société des anciens textes français, 5 vols., 1914-1924. Cf. also Faral, Edmond, "Le Roman de la Rose et la pensée française au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Sept. 15, 1926; Thuasne, Louis, *Le Roman de la Rose (Les grands événements littéraires)*, Paris, 1929; and Bossuat, R., *Le moyen âge*, pp. 257-267.

<sup>155</sup> Wright, Charles Henry Conrad, *A History of French Literature* (Oxford, 1912) p. 108.

<sup>156</sup> *Legend of Good Women*, B. Text, 320.

d'être le copiste de G. de Lorris . . . Quand il renonce à cette poésie de cour si fausse, si maniérée, et qu'il écrit le *Pèlerinage de Canterbury* drame vivant et populaire, on retrouve dans son œuvre les traits saillants qui caractérisent la seconde partie du Roman de la Rose, de longues tirades contre les femmes et le ridicule jeté à pleines mains sur les ordres religieux. Sans doute il remonte aux sources premières où ont puisé ses maîtres, sans doute il étudie les ouvrages de leurs disciples, ses contemporains; mais c'est à l'école de G. de Lorris que son goût s'est formé ou, si l'on veut, altéré; c'est à l'école de Jean de Meung que s'est façonné son esprit.<sup>157</sup>

The study of Sandras, though recognized as an important pioneer work, has been severely criticized for claiming too much. Fansler, for example, while carefully examining Chaucer's indebtedness to the authors of the *Roman de la Rose*, and admitting it, concludes: "The buoyant English pupil was not content to let his cynical French master do his thinking for him. It was not in the school of Jean de Meun but outside of school hours that Chaucer's 'esprit' was fashioned. For Jean, no jocund day stood tip-toe on the misty mountain-tops. Can the same be said of Chaucer?"<sup>158</sup>

But with regard to the main contention of Sandras, Fansler very candidly admits:

If the French critic had said, instead of 'le copiste de G. de Lorris,' 'l'imitateur de l'école de G. de Lorris,' he would have expressed himself in such a way that English students could not be offended . . . if he had been able to present the array of parallels that have been gathered together since his *Etude* appeared, probably no persons fifty years ago, or since, would have challenged his words. Besides, it must be remembered that Sandras did not say *toujours*, but only *souvent*, a very elastic word. All in all, Sandras's general position is not untenable.<sup>159</sup>

One may note, in conclusion, how Chaucer drew upon French authors, small as well as great, such as Guillaume de Guilleville in his *A.B.C.*, upon Marie de France in his *Nun's Priest's Tale*,

<sup>157</sup> Sandias, Etienne Gustave, *Etude sur G. Chaucer considéré comme imitateur des trouvères* (Paris, 1859), p. 36.

<sup>158</sup> Fansler, Dean Spruill, *Chaucer and the Roman de la Rose* (New York, 1914), p. 234. On p. 230 of the same work is given a summary of Chaucer's borrowings from Guillaume and Jean, and the conclusion is reached that Chaucer's borrowings from each is proportionately equal. Cf. Cipriani, Lisi, "Studies in the Influence of the Romance of the Rose upon Chaucer," *PMLA*, xxii (1907), 552-595.

<sup>159</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 123.

upon Benoît de Sainte-More in his *Troilus and Criseyde*,<sup>160</sup> and upon Nicholas Trivet in his *Man of Law's Tale*. (The *Roman de la Rose* has been considered above.) Miss Hammond lists such matters, but is concerned mainly with Chaucer's source material.<sup>161</sup> That all this bears strongly upon the present study is self-evident, and yet is only secondary to its purpose. It is Chaucer's indebtedness to French strophe forms, particularly that of the ballade, which is the main point under discussion. Direct borrowings and translations show his familiarity with the work of his predecessors and contemporaries. But even had there been nothing of this, we should still be able to perceive that Chaucer was deeply in debt to French poetry, and how (despite the powerful mark upon his work made by his contact with Italy) that influence continued to the end.<sup>162</sup>

The note, I trowe, maked was in Fraunce.<sup>163</sup>

To this introductory chapter, already inordinately long, a summary must be added, one that will indicate the connection with Chaucer of the matters that have been discussed.

Good Latinist as Chaucer was, he could hardly have understood all that Latin had meant in the development of the European vernaculars, or how pious hymn-writer and ribald Goliard had shaped for him the verse patterns he was to use with such power. Rhyme, and the accentual verse made possible by rhyme, were his; and no doubt he little troubled himself from whence they had come. He read the classical Latin poets, and he was familiar with the hymns of the Church. But of the popular Latin verse represented by the Goliards it seems safe to say that he knew little, for with the development of the vernacular it had fallen into a decline.<sup>164</sup>

Latin had not ceased to be used, however, for learned and legal purposes; but treading upon the heels of French, came English.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Young, Karl, *The Origin and Development of the Story of Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer Society, 1908.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Hammond, Eleanor Prescott, *Chaucer, a bibliographical manual*, pp. 76-80.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Legouis, Emile, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (London, 1913), pp. 60-61.

<sup>163</sup> *Parlement of Foules*, 677.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Schofield, William Henry, *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer* (New York, 1906), p. 29.

<sup>165</sup> As W. H. Schofield points out: "While Anglo-French and Middle-English

And everywhere poets, the most responsive of writers to the actualities of life, were using their native tongue. Two generations before Chaucer's own prime, Dante had composed his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, which, though in Latin, treats the Italian vernacular with deep understanding. With the triumphs of French and Italian poetry as incentives, the English poet was inspired to emulate them in his own mother tongue. One may even have a suspicion that if he wrote his *Treatise on the Astrolabe* "in naked wordes in English; for Latin ne canstow yit but smal, my lyte sone," it was as much to spare himself as "Litel Lowis." The poet, even when writing as a scientist, caught upon the air a hint of the fact that Latin was about to go out of fashion. And, indeed, the Renaissance, in its attempt to insist upon a severely "classical" Latinity, gave the *coup de grâce* to the popular Latin which was already in its decline. Even Petrarch—"the first modern man"<sup>166</sup>—in his epic poem in Latin, *Africa*, upon which he confidently rested his main hope for fame, is an instance of the Renaissance distrust of the permanence of the vernacular, which was nevertheless destined to be stimulated so feverishly by the "new learning." For this same "new learning"—attempting an impossible revival of classical Latin as a living thing—at least succeeded in discrediting the "old learning" which was still capable of life. The living medium was perceived to be the vernacular.

Concerning Anglo-Saxon little need be said. It must have been almost unintelligible to Chaucer. The principles of its versification persisted, however; but, when in Chaucer's time an attempt was made to reintroduce the alliterative structure of verse, it could only be done by making concessions to French versification. Nor was it possible, as in Anglo-Saxon England, to maintain native alliterative and Latin verse (whether accentual, and rhymed, or belatedly quantitative) side by side with the vernacular without interpen-

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works are for the most part verse, the bulk of Anglo-Latin literature is prose" (*ibid.*, p. 28). A partial list of these Anglo-Latin prose writers is given by John Edwin Sandys (*A History of Classical Scholarship* [Cambridge, 1903], I, 517-524), and a more extended account is supplied by Schofield (*op. cit.*, pp. 26-110). But by far the most complete list of these writers is supplied in *An Index of British and Irish Latin Writers, A.D. 400-1520*, by J. H. Baxter, C. Johnson and J. F. Willard, Paris, 1932.

<sup>166</sup> Renan, Ernest, *Averroës et l'Averroïsme* (Paris, 1882), p. 328.

tration. After Chaucer the alliterative structure was seen to be clearly out of date.

Of Middle English verse Chaucer probably read a considerable quantity. But none of it was great enough to influence him, though he may have found some of it good enough to suggest to his mind that a first-rate poet could write first-rate poetry in English. After all, there is no need to say merely that it may have been so; it must have been so—otherwise Chaucer would have done what Gower did (fearing to entrust his reputation entirely to English) and written in French and Latin.

But if Chaucer did not write in French he had to find (like most of his predecessors) his models in French verse. Some part of this indebtedness has already been pointed out. But the major part of it will be discussed in the chapter which follows, on the Ballade.

*a, b, a, b, b, c, c, d, c, d*, demonstrates that the ten-syllable line is needed by the ten-line stanza.

In addition to the two forms of the ballade proper indicated, and of the *chant royal*, the forms that have survived are the *double ballade* and the *ballade à double refrain*. But these are now very seldom employed.

Among the early balladists, however, there was a tendency to heap complexity upon complexity. The form offered an opportunity (and a temptation) to exquisite ingenuity. Sometimes this ingenuity did not affect the form, as when for instance, Villon used the *envoi* of his *Balade feist a la requeste de sa mere* as an acrostic on his own name.

Vous portastes, Vierge, digne princesse,  
Iesus regnant qui n'a ne fin ne cesse.  
Le Tout Puissant, prenant nostre foiblesse,  
Laissa les cieulx et nous vint secourir,  
Offrit a mort sa tres chiere jeunesse;  
Nostre Seigneur tel est, tel le confesse.  
En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.<sup>28</sup>

Langlois has carefully edited half a dozen medieval treatises which lay down the rules of the Ballade.<sup>29</sup> For instance, the anonymous author of *Les Règles de la Seconde Rhétorique*<sup>30</sup> gives examples of six varieties of the ballade. Baudet Herenc, in *Le Doctrinal de la Seconde Rhétorique*<sup>31</sup> gives us eight. And Jean Molinet, in his *L'Art de Rhétorique*<sup>32</sup> distinguishes six varieties. Of all of these writers it is he who most clearly insists upon a precise correspondence between the number of syllables in the line and the number of lines in the stanza. And he is more complete in his consideration of the ballade and other set forms than any of those just mentioned. Because of this his treatise was taken as the basis for the anonymous *Art et Science de Rhétorique Vulgaire*.<sup>33</sup> The law is stated as follows:

Balade commune doit avoir refrain et trois couplès et l'envoy. Le refrain est la derreniere ligne desdis couplès et de l'envoy, auquel refrain se tire toute la sustance de la balade, ainsi que la sayette au signe du bersail. Et doit chascun couplet, par rigueur d'examen,

<sup>28</sup> Thuausne, L., *François Villon: Œuvres*, I, 215. And this is by no means the only ballade in which Villon used a similar device.

<sup>29</sup> Langlois, Ernest, *Recueil d'arts de seconde rhétorique*, Paris, 1902.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-103.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104-198.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214-252.

avoir autant de lignes que le refrain contient de syllabes. Se le refrain a .viij. syllabes et la derreniere est parfaite, la balade doit tenir forme de vers huytains; se le refrain a .ix. syllabes, les couplès seront de .ix. lignes, dont les quatre premieres se croisent; la .v<sup>e</sup>., .vj<sup>e</sup>. et .vij<sup>e</sup>. sont de pareille termination, differentes aux premieres, et la .vij<sup>e</sup>. et .ix<sup>e</sup>. lignes pareilles en consonance et distinctes a toutes autres. Se la refrain a .x. syllabes, les couplès de la balade sont de .x. lignes, dont les .iiij. premieres se croisent, la .v<sup>e</sup>. pareille a la .iiij<sup>e</sup>., la .vj<sup>e</sup>., la .vij<sup>e</sup>. et la .ix<sup>e</sup>. de pareille termination, et la .vij<sup>e</sup>. et .x<sup>e</sup>. egales en consonance. Se le refrain a .xj. syllabes, les couplès auront .xj. lignes, les .iiij. premieres se croisent, la .v<sup>e</sup>. et .vj<sup>e</sup>. pareilles en rime, la .vij<sup>e</sup>., .vij<sup>e</sup>. et .x<sup>e</sup>. egales en consonance, et la .ix<sup>e</sup>. et .xj<sup>e</sup>. de pareille termination. Et est a noter que tout envoy, lequel a la fois se commence par Prince, a son refrain comme les autres couplès, mais il ne contient que .v. lignes au plus et prent ses terminations et rimes selon les derrenieres lignes des dessusdis couplès.<sup>34</sup>

That at any rate is perfectly clear, and if rigorous in its artificiality, limits the ballade. Deschamps wrote a ballade which he prided himself could be read in eight different ways.<sup>35</sup> And Christine de Pisan (1363-1431) composed four *Balades d'estrange façon*.<sup>36</sup> They abound in intricacies. The one I quote is perhaps the simplest of them all. It is brought in here because it is also an example of that seven-line ballade which Chaucer was to use and which became the basis of rime royal.

Mon doulz ami.—Ma chiere dame.  
—S'acoute a moy.—Trés volontiers,  
—M'aimes tu bien?—Ouil, par m'ame.  
—Si fais je toy.—C'est doulz mestiers.  
—De quoy?—D'amer.—Voire, sanz tiers.  
—Deux cuers en un.—Sanz decepvoir  
—Voire aux loiaulz.—Tu as dit voir.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>1</sup> If further examples of ballade complexity, and of the exercise of ingenuity for its own sweet sake are desired by the reader, he may find such curiosities in Miss Cohen's pages.<sup>38</sup> "Thus," she says, "the form of the *ballade* became more and more diversified. Never-

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 265-426.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 235-236.

<sup>35</sup> *Œuvres complètes de Eustache Deschamps* I, 81. The next page contains Deschamps' instructions as to how this ballade might be read.

<sup>36</sup> Roy, Maurice, *Œuvres poétiques de Christine de Pisan*, Société des anciens textes français, 1886-1896, I, 119-124.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 121.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Cohen, H. L., *The Ballade*, pp. 50-63.

theless, whatever external features were added to its structure, the original three stanzas, persistent rimes, and refrain remained unaltered."<sup>39</sup>

Christine de Pisan did not begin to write until after the death of her husband in 1389, when she was left at the age of twenty-five with three children to support. It is unlikely that Chaucer was acquainted with her work. She is mentioned, therefore, only because she was representative of the ballade-writers of her period. But we know that Chaucer was indebted to Guillaume de Machaut and to his close contemporaries, Jean Froissart, Eustache Deschamps and "Graunson, flour of hem that make in Fraunce."<sup>40</sup>

Every one of these men was a very much smaller poet than Chaucer. Of Machaut, Émile Faguet writes: "Guillaume de Machaut était surtout un styliste et un métricien; le fond est faible; mais la forme et les curiosités rythmiques témoignent de l'invention et une oreille juste et fine."<sup>41</sup> And Legouis points out that the poetry of the "century only escapes absolute dullness through the somewhat childish grace of Froissart's verse, or through the prosiness, occasionally lively and racy, of Eustache Deschamps. But Machaut, their master as well as Chaucer's, is too often just purely wearisome."<sup>42</sup> Only because Chaucer was so great was he able to transcend his models. Otherwise he would have remained nothing but an imitator of the trouvères.<sup>43</sup> But, being the man he was, he throve on what nourishment he could derive from them and, later, after he had received enormous stimulation from Italy, partially outgrew them, retaining, however, to the end, the marks of their influence.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>40</sup> *Compleynt of Venus*, 82. Skeat, W. W., has a note on Otan de Granson in the *Oxford Chaucer* (I, 86-87) and gives the French original translated by Chaucer. (I, 400-404.) Cf. also Piaget, Arthur, "Otan de Granson et ses poésies," *Romania*, XIX (1890), 403-448. Of Chaucer's almost certain acquaintance with Froissart, and his probable acquaintance with Machaut and Deschamps cf. J. M. Manly's ed. *Canterbury Tales* (New York, 1928), p. 43.

<sup>41</sup> Faguet, Emile, *Petite histoire de la littérature française* (Paris and London, no date), p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> Legouis, E., *Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York, 1913), p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> It is as such that Etienne Gustave Sandras considers him. Cf. his *Etude sur G. Chaucer considéré comme imitateur des trouvères* (Paris, 1859). A very recent work bearing upon this is John Livingston Lowes's *Geoffrey Chaucer* (Boston and New York, 1934), pp. 71, 113.



Historically, therefore, these poets must continue to possess for us a considerable interest. And apart altogether from their effect upon Chaucer, their work has real value. Yet it was largely because the fourteenth-century exponents of the set-forms often degenerated into mere artificiality that the *Pléiade* proscribed them. Therefore we find Du Bellay writing:

Ly donques et rely premierement (ò Poète futur) fueillete de main nocturne et journalle les exemplaires grecz et latins: puis me laisse toutes ces vieilles poësies francoyses aux Jeuz Floraux de Thoulouze et au Puy de Rouan: comme rondeaux, ballades, vyrelaiz, chantz royaulx, chansons, et autres telles episseries, qui corrompent le goust de nostre langue, et ne servent si non à porter temoingnage de notre ignorance.<sup>44</sup>

The condemnation, though too sweeping, for a time extinguished the ballade in France. It had long been extinct in England. But the work done by such men as Charles d'Orleans (1391-1465), Villon (1431-c. 1463), and Clement Marot (1497-1540) could not be permanently regarded as mere ingenious trifling. The seventeenth-century revival of the set-forms by La Fontaine and Voiture occurred, and then the ballade and similar verse-forms passed into what appeared to be complete and final oblivion.

But the set-forms, particularly the ballade, serve too definite a function to be summarily neglected. Théodore de Banville revived the ballade, and Villon was rediscovered. In England Swinburne and Rossetti brought the ballade in triumph back; and Austin Dobson, Edmund Gosse, W. E. Henley and Andrew Lang, among others, rivalled de Banville's success.<sup>45</sup> We may expect to see recurring cycles of popularity and neglect for the form. But even if nothing else could be said of it than that Chaucer learned his craft largely through this special mode, the matter still would be worth investigating. Much more can be said than that, however: for it was out of the ballade that Chaucer developed rime royal. To these considerations I must now address myself.

<sup>44</sup> Lommatzsch, Erhard and Wagner, Max Leopold, *Joachim Du Bellay, La défense et illustration de la langue françoise (1549)* (Berlin, 1920), p. 47.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. H. L. Cohen, *The Ballade*, pp. 300-339.

### CHAPTER III

#### CHAUCER AND THE BALLADE

THOUGH most of the ballades of Machaut, Froissart and Deschamps were somewhat mechanical, demanding ingenuity rather than poetic genius, at least this practicing of ballades was useful as literary discipline, at a time when discipline was necessary as a preliminary to further poetic development. The poets of France did not get much beyond the literary exercise. But in England a great poet was born who, after having learned his trade in large part by ballade writing, went on to apply the knowledge so learned in a new way.

Let us see what was Chaucer's practice. To put it in the most comprehensive terms, we may say that, though the poet shows that he is fully aware of the rules of the ballade, in no single extant ballade written by him does he observe all the rules. That is, no ballade of his is constructed of three stanzas of eight lines each, rhyming *a, b, a, b, b, c, b, c* with the last line a refrain, with the same rhymes used in each stanza, and with an *envoi* addressed to the "Prince." Nevertheless if we take the existing ballades as a group we shall see that all the accepted ballade rules are observed in them, though in no single ballade at once.

It is possible that in the *atelier* work of Chaucer's youth there were specimens of the standard ballade. And we know that he did write extensively in the ballade form. Concerning this we have Chaucer's own testimony:

He made the book that hight the Hous of Fame,  
And eek the Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse,  
And the Parlement of Foules, as I gesse,  
And al the love of Palamon and Arcyte  
Of Thebes, thogh the story is knowen lyte;  
And many an ympne for your halydayes,  
That highten Balades, Roundels, Virelayes.<sup>1</sup>

And there is besides this Lydgate's witness:

This said poete, my maister, in his daies  
Maad and compiled ful many a fressh dite,

<sup>1</sup> *The Legend of Good Women*, Text B. pp. 417-425.

Compleyntis, baladis, roundelis, virelaies  
Ful delectable to heryn and to see.<sup>2</sup>

And if this is not enough, Chaucer deplores in the Retraction at the end of *The Canterbury Tales* "many a song and many a lecherous lay."

To what "Balades, Roundels, Virelayes" was he referring in *The Legend of Good Women*? Most of his ballades clearly belong to a date later than that of the *Legend*. In any event there are not many of them. Where are the many songs and lecherous lays of which he had to repent? We have nothing that answers to such a description; yet we know that they were written.

We can only speculate. Chaucer may have destroyed them in later life, because he disapproved of them on moral grounds. We have seen that of some of his poems he did so disapprove. Short fugitive poems could be much more easily suppressed than longer works that had been some time in circulation, though of these too some have disappeared.

But, as we know from the Retraction, not all of these could have been suppressed because Chaucer was troubled in conscience about them.<sup>3</sup> They may merely have been lost.

The same explanation may be quite sufficient to cover the disappearance of the ballades. On the other hand, Chaucer, as Lounsbury suggests, may not have thought them worth keeping.<sup>4</sup> And this merely because he was ashamed of their artistic immaturity.

Against this we have the fact that Chaucer alludes to them with some pride in *The Legend of Good Women*, and that Lydgate evidently thought well of them. But whatever be the reason the poems are gone. And among them were ballades.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Bergen, Henry, *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1923-1927, Part I (Books I and II), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> For example, *Origen on the Magdalen* and *The Wretched Engendering of Mankind*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lounsbury, Thomas R., *Studies in Chaucer* (New York, 1892), III, 313-314.

<sup>5</sup> But Lydgate in *An Envoy to Duke Humphrey*, which concludes his work, *The Fall of Princes* refers to,

The souereyn balladys of Chauceer,  
Which among alle that euere were rad or songe,  
Excellyd al othir in our Englyssh tounge.

—Bergen, H., *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, Part III (Books VI to IX), p. 1015.

We can therefore discuss only what we have. With the handful of surviving ballades before us, it is possible to say that Chaucer's practice in the matter of ballade writing is best exemplified by the ballade incorporated in *The Legend of Good Women* and in his *Balade de Bon Conseil*, usually entitled *Truth*. For the sake of record these should be cited here. The one, it will be noted, has no *envoi*; the other has an *envoi* which has the same number of lines as the three stanzas and yet, because of its address to "the Prince," is clearly an *envoi* and not a mere fourth stanza.

Hyd, Absolon, thy gilte tresses clere;  
 Ester, ley thou thy meknesse al a-doun;  
 Hyd, Jonathas, al thy frendly manere;  
 Penelopee, and Marcia Catoun,  
 Mak of your wyfhod no comparisoun;  
 Hyde ye your beautes, Isoude and Eleyne,  
 My lady cometh, that al this may disteyne.

Thy faire body, lat hit nat appere,  
 Lavyne; and thou, Lucesse of Rome toun,  
 And Polixene, that boghten love so dere,  
 And Cleopatre, with al thy passioun,  
 Hyde ye your trouthe of love and your renoun;  
 And thou, Tisbe, that hast of love swich payne;  
 My lady cometh, that al this may disteyne.

Herro, Dido, Laudomia, alle y-fere,  
 And Phyllis, hanging for thy Demophoun,  
 And Canace, espyed by thy chere,  
 Ysiphile, betrayesd with Jasoun,  
 Maketh of your trouthe neyther boost ne soun;  
 Nor Ypermistre or Adriane, ye tweyne;  
 My lady cometh, that al this may disteyne.<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*

Flee fro the prees, and dwelle with sothfastnesse,  
 Suffyce unto thy good, though hit be smal;  
 For hord hath hate, and climbing tikelnesse,  
 Prees hath envye, and wele blent overal;  
 Savour no more than thee bihove shal;  
 Werk wel thy-self, that other folk canst rede;  
 And trouthe shal deliver, hit is no drede.

Tempest thee nocht al croked to redresse,  
 In trust of hir that turneth as a bal:

<sup>6</sup> *The Legend of Good Women*, Text B., pp. 249-269.

Gret reste stant in litel besinesse;  
 And eek be war to sporne ageyn an al;  
 Stryve noght, as doth the crokke with the wal.  
 Daunte thy-self, that daurtest otheres dede;  
 And trouthe shal delivere, hit is no drede.

That thee is sent, receyve in buxumnesse,  
 The wrastling for this worlde axeth a fal.  
 Her nis non hom, her nis but wildernesse:  
 Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stall!  
 Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al;  
 Hold the hye wey, and lat thy gost thee lede:  
 And trouthe shal delivere, hit is no drede.

#### ENVOY

Therefore, thou vache, leve thyn old wrecchednesse  
 Unto the worlde; leve now to be thral;  
 Crye him mercy, that of his hy goodnesse  
 Made thee of noght, and in especial  
 Draw unto him, and pray in general  
 For thee, and eek for other, hevenlich mede;  
 And trouthe shal delivere, hit is no drede.<sup>7</sup>

These indicate the two main types of Chaucerian ballades. Instead of an eight-line stanza we get one of seven, rhymed *a, b, a, b, b, c, c*, whether or not an *envoi* is used. The *envoi* has seven lines in the *Balade de Bon Conseyl* and the *Lak of Stedfastnesse*, but sometimes (as in the *Purse*, *Fortune* and the *Compleynt of Venus*) the stanza formation and the rhyme scheme have no relation to the body of the poem.<sup>8</sup>

But in Chaucer's predecessors and contemporaries we find much the same thing. Machaut never uses an *envoi* for his ballades, though he always does so when writing a *chant royal*, or "chanson royal," as he calls it. Deschamps, on the other hand, is generally very strict in his conformity to the rubric in this matter. It is interesting to note, however, an eight-line ballade without an *envoi* occurring

<sup>7</sup> Skeat, W. W., *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, second edition (Oxford, 1926), I, 390-391.

<sup>8</sup> As an example of Machaut's ballades, take the one on p. 35 (written in an eight-line stanza) and the one on p. 37 (written in a seven-line stanza). A "chanson royal" may be found on p. 59. (Chichmaref, V., *Guillaume de Machaut, Poésies lyriques* [Paris, 1909], Vol. I.) Which goes to show that the ballade took over the refrain from the *chant royal*.

now and then.<sup>9</sup> A nine-line ballade without an *envoi*,<sup>10</sup> a ten-line ballade without an *envoi*,<sup>11</sup> and an eleven-line ballade without an *envoi*<sup>12</sup> show his departure from the rule he normally follows.

But the most interesting of his departures from the strict form is his employment of the seven-line ballade, sometimes without an *envoi*,<sup>13</sup> and sometimes with an *envoi* of four lines.<sup>14</sup> The rhyme scheme of his seven-line stanza is the same as Machaut's, *a, b, a, b, b, c, c*. And this (which is a point that must be returned to later) is Chaucer's rhyme scheme.<sup>15</sup>

Froissart also writes ballades without an *envoi*.<sup>16</sup> In fact most of his ballades are of this character.<sup>17</sup> He normally employs the eight-line stanza. But he varies the number of lines in the stanza. Nine<sup>18</sup> are sometimes found, as are ten.<sup>19</sup> His eleven-line stanza is reserved for his *chansons roiaus amoureuses*, and in these he has the *envoi* with the address to the "Prince."<sup>20</sup> But it should be noticed that in these, though he retains the same rhymes throughout the poem, he employs no refrain.<sup>21</sup>

As in the case of Deschamps, it would be a task as tedious as unnecessary to classify Froissart's ballades into all their varieties. But two important facts in his practice that bear upon Chaucer's

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Marquis de Queux de St. Hilaire and Reynaud, Gaston, *Œuvres complètes de Eustache Deschamps* (Paris, 1878-1903), III, 281-282, 298-299

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 282-283.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 270-271.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 266-267.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 72-73.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 216-217.

<sup>15</sup> There is no need for a full classification of all the departures from normal pattern exhibited in the 1175 ballades of Deschamps. Nothing would be gained by such an analysis in this connection. But it may be said that every possible variation would seem to have been employed by Deschamps. For other indebtedness of Chaucer to Deschamps cf. Lowes, John Livingston, "Illustrations of Chaucer," drawn chiefly from Deschamps, *Romanic Review*, II (1911), 113-128, and Lowes, J. L. "The Chaucerian 'Merciles Beaute' and Three Poems of Deschamps," *Modern Language Review*, V (1910), 33-39 in which an argument is presented for the genuineness of Chaucer's triple roundel (doubted by A. W. Pollard) and for their relation to a *chancon baladé* by Deschamps.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Scheler, Auguste, *Œuvres de Froissart, Poésies* (Bruxelles, 1872), III, 250.

<sup>17</sup> He does not entitle them *balades* but *amoureux*, yet without attempting to confine that title to poems in the ballade form. And he uses the term *balade* occasionally (Cf. *Œuvres* III, 77).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 116-117.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 78-79.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 353-365.

<sup>21</sup> On the other hand he does so in his "Pastourelles" (*Ibid.*, II, 306-352).

practice must be pointed out. The first is that he has a way of writing a perfectly correct standard ballade of three eight-line stanzas, to which he adds a fourth eight-line stanza which should be the *envoi*, yet lacks its character.<sup>22</sup> The other is that he has a way of changing the number of lines in his stanzas and of introducing new rhymes, while yet retaining the ballade character of his poems.<sup>23</sup> He preserved, it is true, an organic relation between his first three stanzas and the last (an imperfect *envoi*), which is something that Chaucer did not always do. But the freedom of his practice must have been confusing to Chaucer if the English poet read (as presumably he did) ballades by Froissart that exhibited this irregularity. With such models before him it is no wonder that Chaucer had no uniform mould for his ballades; the wonder, rather, is that he conformed as closely as he did to the standard ballade. Chaucer however avoided the complexities in which the French poets delighted, and reduced his own ballades to the simple formula of the seven-line stanza which he took over from them. This, which in their case seems to have been an exquisite sophistication of the ballade, he made, because of his instinct for form, style, and the genius of the English language, into the basis of his rime royal.

It is instructive to note that this seven-line ballade (sometimes with and sometimes without an *envoi*) did not survive among French balladists, though it was common at the time. Only Chaucer perceived its possibilities. In this connection may be cited two poems in this form, one by Jehan de la Mote written in 1339 and headed *Cançon*, as were so many other ballades, the other by Christine de Pisan. There is no reason for supposing that Chaucer had read either; but we may be certain that in his reading of Machaut and Deschamps he had encountered many ballades along the same lines.

On ne poroit penser ne souhaidier  
 Plus grant tourment ne plus aspre dolour,  
 Qui s'est en mi venue hierbegier,  
 Jou qui soloie iestre dame d'onour,  
 Car j'ai bien cause en mi d'avoir tristour,

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 226-227.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 100-101 and in many other places. Another, and a very different, instance of Chaucer's borrowing from Froissart has been proved by Kittredge, George Lyman, in his "Chaucer and Froissart," *Englische Studien*, xxvi (1899), 321-336.

Ne me faura jamais tant con je dure,  
 Puis c'ai pierdu le flour de douçour pure.

Car ceste flour a osté dou rosier  
 Pires que coers mesdisans plains d'errour,  
 Car mesdisans poet on bien apaisier,  
 Mès ne voi ci ne voie ne retour  
 Pour quoi joie aye, ainsçois arai gringnour  
 Painne, et c'est drois: d'autre cose n'ai cure,  
 Puis c'ai pierdu le flour de douçour pure.

Et non pourquant Nature voel pryer  
 Que le bouton qu'il laissa pour savoir  
 Sour l'oudourant grascieus englentier,  
 Voelle nourir em parfaite valour,  
 Que de par li raie aucune douçour,  
 Car li espoirs de li me reseüre  
 Puis c'ai pierdu le flour de douçour pure.<sup>24</sup>

Now for Christine's ballade, one out of several that could be cited in the same form. It will be noted that it corresponds to Chaucer's usage.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless Christine de Pisan normally follows the standard pattern of the ballade, and though, as has been previously noted, she indulged herself in somewhat pointless complexities, these rarely extended to the patterns of her strophes.

Je pri a Dieu qu'il lui doint bonne nuit  
 A la très belle, ou sont tous mes reclaims,  
 Et qu'il ne soit chose qui lui anuit,  
 Fors seulement que d'elle si loings mains.  
 Car de tel mal moult bien me plaist qu'atains  
 Soit son doulz cuer, si qu'adès lui souviégne  
 De son ami, desirant qu'il reviegne.

<sup>24</sup> Scheler, Auguste, *Li Regret Guillaume Comte de Hainaut par Jehan de le Mote* (Louvain, 1882), p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Chatelain, Henri, *Recherches sur le vers français au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1908), pp. 144-145, lists a large number of strophe forms rhyming *a, b, a, b, b, c, c*. Most of these are in ballades, and all are derived from the ballade. Most of them are in lines of eight syllables, but among them are stanzas in the decasyllabic line. The important fact, however, is not the number of syllables in the line but the rhyme scheme of the seven-line stanza. Kastner, Leon Emilé, *A History of French Versification* (Oxford, 1903, 264-265), notes that strophes of seven lines are particularly common in the poets of the fourteenth century, and quotes Christine de Pisan (*Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Maurice Roy, I, 12) by way of example.



C'est la plus belle et la meilleur, je cuid,  
 Qui soit ou monde, et si suis tous certains  
 Que loiaulté de tout gouverne et duit  
 Son noble cuer, qui n'est fier ne haultains,  
 Ne de villain penser taché ne tains;  
 Si requier Dieu que nouvelles lui viegne  
 De son ami, desirant qu'il reviegne.

Ha! que fusse je ores ou doulx reduit,  
 Ou elle maint, je porté ou ampains!  
 A lui seroit et a moy grant deduit,  
 Si seroient un pou noz maulx estains;  
 Dieux! que sceust elle au moins comment je l'aims?  
 Si le sçara, mais qu'en l'amour se tiegne  
 De son ami, desirant qu'il reviegne.<sup>26</sup>

But as these two ballades were probably never seen by Chaucer, examples of the same stanza should be quoted from Machaut, Deschamps, and Froissart. All of these are, of course, in ballade form, but of each specimen only the first stanza need be quoted.

J'ay mon bec jaune poié trop folement  
 Jusques à ci, mais je ne le plain mie,  
 Pour tant que nulz n'est sages, s'il n'apprent;  
 Et j'ay appris à connoistre m'amie,  
 Car elle m'a sa foy à tort mentie.  
 Dont je voy bien par droite experiance  
 Qu'amour de femme a pou de conscience.<sup>27</sup>

\* \* \*

Je vous gracy et mercy humblement,  
 Tresdoulce dame, tant com je puis et sçay,  
 Du doulx respons fait amoureusement,  
 Et du rondel tresamoureux que j'ay,  
 Qui me nourrist et me gette d'esmay,  
 Et qui me fait vivre en telle esperance  
 Que de moy n'est plus amoureux en France.<sup>28</sup>

Froissart does not use the seven-line stanza in his ballades except in the following piece. The important point, as has been already said, is not so much the length of the line but the length of the stanza and the arrangement of its rhymes. And in these respects Froissart's *Balade* corresponds to Chaucer's. /

<sup>26</sup> Roy, Maurice, *Œuvres poétiques de Christine de Pisan* (Paris, 1886-96), I, 76-77.

<sup>27</sup> Chichmaref, V., *Guillaume de Machaut, Poésies lyriques*, II, 642.

<sup>28</sup> *Œuvres complètes de Eustache Deschamps*, III, 262.

Maniere en plaisant arroi  
 Est forment recommandée  
 En dame, et fust fille à roy,  
 Car, quant elle en est parée,  
 Elle est de tous honnourée,  
 Amée et prisie aussi  
 Pour le bien qu'on voit en li.<sup>29</sup>

It should be perfectly clear where Chaucer derived his seven-line ballade stanza, from which he later developed rime royal. It is nothing but a fairly common variant of the ballade octave. And while it would be easy to imagine Chaucer modifying that octave on his own initiative by the simple procedure of removing its seventh line, there is no need to do so in view of the cases of stanzas exactly like his own.

Yet Tyrwhitt could find nothing closer to rime royal than something which he says is very like it in some of the poems of Thibaut of Navarre.<sup>30</sup> The only difference is that the last two verses, which in Chaucer's Stanza form a distinct couplet, are made by Thibaut to rime with the first and third."<sup>31</sup> But he mentions that he found one piece by Folquet of Marseilles, who died in 1213, in which the stanza was exactly like Chaucer's.<sup>32</sup> It is, however, unlikely that Chaucer knew anything about this. We need not go any further than the models we know Chaucer to have used—the seven-line ballades of Machaut and Deschamps.

The ballades of Chaucer which we possess—and the authenticity of some of these has been questioned—are invariably assigned to a late period in his life. Miss Hammond suggests that, with the decay of his powers, he returned to the earlier French models he had discarded.<sup>33</sup> But we have no real reason for supposing that Chaucer's powers ever decayed. It would seem that Chaucer reserved the ballade form (for his late occasional pieces) as Milton reserved

<sup>29</sup> Scheler, A., *Œuvres de Froissart, Poésies*, II, 89

<sup>30</sup> Such stanzas are to be found in Axel Gabriel Wallensköld's, *Les Chansons de Thibaut de Champagne, roi de Navarre*, Société des anciens textes français, 1925, pp 222, 223. But there are other seven-line stanzas patterned only slightly differently (pp 184-185, 51)

<sup>31</sup> Tyrwhitt, Thomas, *The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer* (Edinburgh, 1868), note 63, p xl

<sup>32</sup> This is given in a footnote on page 83 of this work

<sup>33</sup> Hammond, Eleanor Prescott, *Chaucer a bibliographical manual*, p. 71.

the sonnet. Moreover, as has already been said, and will be said again, his later work, as far as the pattern is concerned, in the main is one with that of his youth.

Without going into the matter in wearisome detail, let us look at some of the reasons for believing Chaucer's ballades to be late work. Some of these can hardly be said to be conclusive.<sup>34</sup> But there is no contesting others.

For instance, there is the *envoi* of the *Compleynt of Venus*:

Princess receyveth this compleynt in gree,  
Unto your excellent benignitee,  
Direct after my litel suffisaunce.  
For eld, that in my spirit dulleth me,  
Hath of endyting al the soteltee  
Wel ny bereft out of my remembraunce;  
And eek to me hit is a greet penaunce,  
Sith rym in English hath swich scarsitee,  
To folowe word by word the curiositee  
Of Gransoun, flour of hem that make in Fraunce.<sup>35</sup>

But though Chaucer by no means followed Granson "word by word," as we may see by comparing the translation with the original,<sup>36</sup> he nevertheless produced a poem of dextrous complexity, consisting of three ballades followed by an *envoi*, a technical triumph that would have taxed the skill of any man, and which even Chaucer could hardly have improved upon in his prime.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> For instance Jack, Adolphus Alfred, *A Commentary on the Poetry of Chaucer and Spenser* (Glasgow, 1920), writes "Of the very minor poems it is not necessary to say more than can be said in a note. Except for 'Rosamond,' a dainty frolic, exquisite in half-humorous art, they are all taken by all the editors to be the last 'Fortune,' 'Truth,' 'Gentillesse,' the 'Lak of Stedfastnesse' and 'The Former Age'—these are all the old man's song. By themselves they would have given no poet lasting reputation, but evidently they are the work of a considerable writer, and add something to our pleasant feeling of Chaucer. . . . The tone is old, grave, weighty, measured, unlike the other work of Chaucer, the leaves being brown and beginning to fall from the tree" (pp. 115-116).

<sup>35</sup> *Compleynt of Venus*, 73-82. This George Herbert Cowling ("Chaucer's *Complaintes of Mars and of Venus*," *Review of English Studies*, II [1926], 405-410) would date 1386.

<sup>36</sup> Skeat, W. W., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, I, 400-404.

<sup>37</sup> "The apology was hardly necessary. Age certainly had not much dulled the art, however much it may have daunted the spirit, of one who could successfully accomplish a feat of this kind." Lounsbury, Thomas R., *Studies in Chaucer*, III, 312.

Moreover it is always unsafe to take Chaucer's references to himself seriously. If he jokes about the infirmity of his age, so also he jokes about his fatness, which seems to have been no more than comfortable stoutness. It was precisely because he had produced an exceedingly adroit piece of versification that he could afford to affect to slight it.

The *Compleynt of Venus* is usually assigned to about 1390. The poem entitled *Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan*, in which the line

But now so wepeth Venus in hir spere<sup>38</sup>

is supposed (plausibly enough) to refer to the great floods of 1393 mentioned in Stow's *Annales*, is evidently a late poem.

The two references it contains to his rotundity<sup>39</sup> are beside the point, for he had long been stout. The Eagle in *The Hous of Fame* it will be recalled

Sayde twyës, 'Seynte Marie!  
Thou art noyous for to carie!<sup>40</sup>

But in *Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan*, Chaucer refers to his grey hairs:

Lo! olde Grisel list to ryme and pleye!<sup>41</sup>

and again to his age:

God help me so! in no rym, doutelees,  
Ne thinke I never of slepe wak my muse,  
That rusteth in my shethe stille in pees.  
Why! I was yong, I putte hir forth in prees,  
But al shal passe that men prose or ryme,  
Take every man his turn, as for his tyme.<sup>42</sup>

This poem is not strictly a ballade, for it consists of six stanzas of rime royal followed by an *envoi*, also in rime royal. But because, as we shall see later, Chaucer evidently considered three stanzas of rime royal (though without the same set of rhymes throughout and without a refrain) to be a ballade, we may treat *Lenvoy a Scogan* as a double ballade. Its ballade character is further emphasised by the *envoi*.

The poem entitled *Lenvoy de Chaucer a Bukton* must also be put in the ballade group. It consists of three ballade octaves, with an

<sup>38</sup> *Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> *Lenvoy a Scogan*, 27, 31.

<sup>40</sup> *Hous of Fame*, 573-574.

<sup>41</sup> *Lenvoy a Scogan*, 35.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-42.

octave *envoi*. We know it to be a late poem because in it he invites his friend, who is contemplating marriage, to take warning by reading "The Wyf of Bath" (no doubt meaning the Prologue to the tale) <sup>43</sup> This, together with its reference to what happened to prisoners taken in Fryse<sup>44</sup> dates the poem between 1393 and 1396.

So far so good. But we are on much less solid ground when we try to date the ballade *To Rosemounde* late in Chaucer's career merely because "like the *Merciles Beaute* [it] must belong to a period when Chaucer had become thoroughly emancipated from the school of love-poetry represented by his more conventional 'compleynts.'"<sup>45</sup> We need not question his emancipation; but is a poet's development all along one straight line? Must not something be allowed to mood?

*Gentillesse*, too, might have been written at almost any period of the poet's career. The fact that it is colored with the Boethian philosophy would not necessarily prove that it was written after the *Boece*. For Chaucer may well have been saturated in Boethius from his youth, as were so many men of the middle ages. There is no need to suppose that his translation of a work indicates that he had just become acquainted with it.

The *Balade de Bon Conseyl* (or *Truth*) according to Shirley was written on Chaucer's death-bed. This testimony is not lightly to be rejected; but all the same may not be accurate. The sententious moral tone seems to be hardly the one Chaucer would have used with the fear of hell hanging over him. It was not the tone of his dying remarks reported by Thomas Gascoigne, Chancellor of Oxford University,<sup>46</sup> or of the passionate and explicit repentance of the Retraction at the end of *The Canterbury Tales*.

Brusendorff rejects the authenticity of the *envoi*, pointing out that Sir Philip de la Vache (identified by Miss Rickert with "Thou vache")<sup>47</sup> did not die until 1408.<sup>48</sup> And in a somewhat acidulous foot-

<sup>43</sup> *Lenvoy a Bukton*, 29 Kittredge, George Lyman, calls attention to its resemblance to a ballade by Deschamps, "Chaucer's *Envoy to Bukton*," *Modern Language Notes*, XXIV (1909), 14-15

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23

<sup>45</sup> French, Robert Dudley, *A Chaucer Handbook* (New York, 1927), p. 106.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Kirk, Richard Edward Gent, *Chaucer's Life Records* (Chaucer Society, 1900), p. 332.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Rickert, Edith, "Thou Vache," *Modern Philology*, II (1913), 209-225.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Brussendorff, Aage, *The Chaucer Tradition* (London and Copenhagen, 1925), p. 249.

note he remarks: "Miss Rickert first proves the acquaintanceship from the single fact that Sir Philip was the son-in-law of Sir Lewis Clifford, whom Chaucer probably knew, and then finds additional confirmation of the latter friendship in the supposed fact of the former! . . . That *best* in the third stanza also refers to the name of *Vache* . . . is an entirely unwarranted conclusion."<sup>49</sup>

The force of Brusendorff's objection to Miss Rickert's generally accepted suggestion must be admitted. But this does not dispose of the authenticity of the *envoi*. If the *vache* should have its capital removed (and it is so printed in the editions of Skeat and Pollard, though not of Robinson) the difficulty raised by Brusendorff concerning the date of the death of de la Vache also would be removed. The ballade is in Chaucer's best manner, and the *envoi* is organic with it. But there is no reason, excepts Shirley's statement, why we need place it in 1400, though it probably does belong to the last decade of his life.

The *Lak of Stedfastnesse* has been assigned to the last years of Richard II's reign; but French,<sup>50</sup> following Pollard,<sup>51</sup> argues that it should be dated 1386-89. It would fit either period equally well—but it might just as well belong to an earlier one for anything that specifically dates it. However, one manuscript says (for what that is worth) that the poem is a "Balade Royale made by our Laureal poete Albyon in hees laste yeeres."

The *Compleynt of Chaucer to his Empty Purse* unmistakably refers in the *envoi* to the usurpation of Henry IV, who was declared king on the last day of September, 1399. On the other hand one of the manuscripts is headed "A supplication to Kyng Richard by chaucier." How is the discrepancy to be explained?

Very simply: Chaucer, like Machaut and Deschamps, wrote ballades sometimes with and sometimes without an *envoi*. But where the *envoi* occurs in his rhymed ballades it has a structural relationship to the body of the poem. This *envoi* has absolutely none, but,

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249. But cf. in this connection, Kittredge, George Lyman, "Chaucer and some of his Friends," *Modern Philology*, I (1903), 1-19.

<sup>50</sup> French, R. D., *A Chaucer Handbook*, p. 109.

<sup>51</sup> Pollard, Alfred William, Preface to *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. xlix. Holt, Lucius Hudson, "Chaucer's *Lak of Stedfastnesse*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, VI (1907), 419-431, examines the MSS. closely, but throws no light upon the question now at issue.

on the contrary, has every appearance of having been hurriedly added at a date later than that of the composition of the poem. It may well have been written originally for the purpose of unloosing the purse-strings of Richard; and the poet may later have had the idea of trying it upon Henry (with a new *envoi* tacked on). It has been rumored that the same love poem has been sent to several ladies in succession. What more natural than that a gracefully humorous begging poem should be used in the same way?

All this is not an attempt to prove that any of the extant ballades by Chaucer are early work (for such proof would be impossible), but only to suggest that the assignment of late dates to *all* of them is far from safe. The verse tests do not help us much here, and even when they are of service elsewhere those who administer them frankly admit that they are not absolutely sure.<sup>52</sup>

The more of the extant ballades that are assigned to Chaucer's later years, the more we have to assume a number of lost ballades written by Chaucer in his youth. For in the passage quoted earlier in this chapter a great point is made of an abundant lyric poetry in set-forms that has not come down to us.

If we are to accept all the extant ballades as belonging to Chaucer's middle and late years, that would only prove that he clung to the ballade to the end, which is not under dispute. Indeed that would be merely to confirm my thesis: that his art had been too closely conditioned by his use of the ballade for him ever to discard the form, however much he may have extended its range.

But if he used the ballade in old age we might reasonably infer (even apart from his own testimony and Lydgate's) that he had used it still more extensively when he was young. Such ingenious complexities normally belong to a poet's youth, and are normally discarded, or employed less frequently in maturity. But everything about Chaucer indicates normality. The demonstrably late ballades are all occasional poems. That he used the form now and then towards the end of his life would point to his having done a still greater amount of ballade writing at the time when he was learning his craft.

Things of this sort a young poet writes because he has not yet

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Tatlock, John S. P., *The Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works* (Chaucer Society, 1907), pp. 18, 36, and Cowling, G. H., *Chaucer* (London, 1927), p. 68.

found anything very important to say, and because he has delight in exercising and exhibiting his own cleverness. During his apprenticeship a poet gains much from the use of a form that is hard, tight, bright, rigid. This would be specially true of a poet like Chaucer who ripened steadily and somewhat slowly. After his visits to Italy he found new material to handle, and new subjects, and a fresh inspiration. But before he went to Italy he had acquired technical mastery. Otherwise he would not have been able to take full advantage of the new experience. He did not need to go to Italy to find rime royal, for that, as has been shown, was in the French ballades he imitated; and more about this will be said in a later chapter. And the Italian poets did not use rime royal.

This pattern he derived from the ballade. And if, like Sir W. S. Gilbert's Prince Agib,

He wrote a lot of ballet music in his teens,

it is just what one would expect of a young poet of sunny normality to do.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE ITALIAN INFLUENCE UPON CHAUCER

SINCE the publication of ten Brink's *Chaucer Studien*<sup>1</sup> it has become customary to divide Chaucer's life and work into three distinct periods—French, Italian and English. Without for a moment denying that the hint thrown out was valuable, one might urge that too much may easily be made of it. We have seen that Chaucer's early literary models were all French. We shall see how he came under Italian influence, and in what way and to what extent this modified his literary practice. (But the indication of an "English" period can have no more meaning than that, at the height of his power, Chaucer transcended to some extent both his French and Italian models, while drawing freely from the life around him in England for subject matter. By unerring instinct he led English poetry in the right direction, but he utilized no English models for his own guidance. For had he done so he would have been obliged to go back to the principle of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse which had a revival just at the moment he began to write, but which did not affect his own work to the slightest extent, and which indeed his own very different practice showed definitely to be obsolete. That Chaucer was always ready to learn something new is true. And, because of his readiness to learn, he gradually broadened. But it is a false simplification of his case to talk too definitely of "periods.") He added to his *repertoire*, but, as will be attempted to be shown here, he did not discard anything of importance.

Recent investigations, therefore, concerning the date of Chaucer's first visit to Italy are not vital to the argument advanced in these pages, nor can they be fatal to it; but they should be noted.

Miss Rickert has shown that the poet went abroad in 1368. But it is unknown whether this was his first visit; or whether he went for pleasure, or on private or on public business; or where he went. It is only a likely guess that he was carrying a letter to Lionel Duke

<sup>1</sup> Ten Brink, Bernhard, *Chaucer: Studien zur Geschichte seiner Entwicklung und zur Chronologie seiner Schriften*, Münster, 1870. But John Livingston Lowes' remark on Chaucer's "so-called Italian period, which was never Italian in the sense in which the earlier period had been French" (*The Art of Geoffrey Chaucer* [London, 1931, p. 20] should be remembered.

of Clarence, who was then in Italy.<sup>2</sup> The sole fact suggesting a long journey was that Chaucer took £10 with him, a sum amply sufficient for such a journey indeed, but no proof of it. The most that can be said is, "of the distant places to which Englishmen commonly went then—Prussia, Gascony, Spain and Italy—Italy seems the most likely to have been his objective."<sup>3</sup> We are unlikely to know more about this, and it is unsafe to assert anything when our information is so slight.

Though in days when all educated men could use the medium of Latin fairly fluently it was not essential, even with one charged with an embassy, to speak the language of the country he was visiting, such a knowledge of the vernacular would nevertheless have been a decided advantage. That Chaucer was sent to Italy at all suggests that he may have known Italian before going.<sup>4</sup> If so, he did not know it well, for he does not display in his work any acquaintance with Italian literature until after 1373. And while this would not invalidate Miss Rickert's suggestion, it would seem to indicate, if he went to Italy for the first time in 1368, either that he was too much occupied with the business in hand to have much leisure for letters, or that at that time his knowledge of Italian was too meagre to allow him to read with any immediate profit the poets who were afterwards to mean so much to him.<sup>5</sup> Even though definite proof be brought forward in favor of 1368, which seems extremely unlikely, it would still be impossible to advance the Italian influence much earlier than the date assigned to it (1373).

The extent of that influence, and of Chaucer's indebtedness to Boccaccio, Dante, and Petrarch has been pretty thoroughly explored. The Italian Borghesi, perhaps because of a very understandable pride in his national literature, has tended to exaggerate

<sup>2</sup> Rickert, Edith, "New Life Records of Chaucer," *London Times Literary Supplement*, Sept. 27, 1928, p. 684, and "Chaucer Abroad in 1368," *Modern Philology*, xxv, 511.

<sup>3</sup> *London Times Literary Supplement*, p. 684

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Manly, John Matthews, ed. *Canterbury Tales* (New York, 1928), p. 16, and Rickert, Edith, *London Times Literary Supplement*, Oct. 4, 1928, p. 704.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Tatlock, John S. P., "The Duration of Chaucer's Visit to Italy," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, xii (1913), pp. 113-121. There it is plausibly argued that the time Chaucer spent in Italy on his two visits could hardly have been more than five months in all, but that we should not, therefore, suppose that he did not afterwards have opportunity for securing Italian books.

the matter.<sup>6</sup> And H. M. Cummings, reacting against excessive claims, has tended perhaps to underestimate it.<sup>7</sup>

(In any event the Italian influence, both in the matters of content and style, was considerable. Because Chaucer got to know Boccaccio, Dante,<sup>8</sup> and Petrarch—and only because of it—he was able to write *Troilus and Criseyde*, the *Knight's Tale*, the *Clerk's Tale*, and the *Monk's Tale*, though in these at the same time he derived much from other sources.)

The question of Chaucer's derivation of content, however, need not be discussed here, where the inquiry is limited to poetic pattern.

(Tatlock summarizes his views:

It is possible to misunderstand the Italian influence on Chaucer; what it did for him, it seems to me, was to open the sluice rather than to fill the reservoir. He had long been a mature man, and, what we do not always remember, familiar with the greatest poets of the Romans. Till he went to Italy, what he lacked was a poetic form, and the ability to assimilate the influence of ancients; he had had hitherto only the *trouvère* manner of the French.<sup>9</sup>)

I venture to dissent from one phrase of this statement: "What he lacked was poetic form," and the inference that he found this in Italy. That an increase in technical mastery was discernible soon

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Borghesi, Pietro, *Boccaccio and Chaucer*, Bologna, 1903.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Cummings, Hubertis Maurice, *The Indebtedness of Chaucer's Works to the Italian Works of Boccaccio*, Menasha, Wis., 1916. Karl Young's monograph *The Origin and Development of the Story of Troilus and Criseyde* (Chaucer Society, 1908), does not deal directly with this, but rather with the relationship of *Il Filostrato* and *Il Filocolo* to the *Roman de Troie* and the *Historia Troiana*.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Lowes, John Livingston, "Chaucer and Dante," *Modern Philology*, xiv (1917), 705-735, who argues that "the influence of Dante upon Chaucer is even more pervasive and significant than has been commonly supposed" (p. 735). Tatlock, J. S. P., "Chaucer and Dante," *Modern Philology*, iii (1906), concludes, "Different as the two poets were, such was the power of the one and the receptiveness of the other that the greater affected both the other's view of the universe and his style" (p. 372). What neither writer attempts to show, however, is any considerable influence of Dante upon the versification of Chaucer. Perhaps the best article on the subject is that by C. Looten, *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, v (1925), 545-571, which examines the *nature* rather than the *extent* of Dante's effect upon Chaucer. The conclusion reached is that the Italian, being the antithesis in personality to the English poet, served Chaucer most effectually by indicating to him clearly that he should strike out a line consonant with the character of his own genius

after 1373 must be admitted, and this was no doubt due to Chaucer's contact with Italian literature. (Yet it was not a new technique in versification, but merely the old somewhat modified and used with greater boldness and freedom.)

(Manly writes somewhat along the same lines as Tatlock:

The great debt of Chaucer to the Italians . . . was perhaps not so much because they furnished new materials and new models for imitation, as because they stimulate his powers of reflection by forms and ideals of art different from those with which he was familiar.<sup>10</sup>)

There is a guarded "perhaps," and even without it there is little to which anybody could take definite exception. And the same thing could be said of the further statement:

To any student of his technique, Chaucer's development reveals itself unmistakably, not as a progress from crude, untrained native power to a style and method polished by fuller acquaintance with rhetorical precepts and more sophisticated models, but rather as a process of gradual release from the astonishingly artificial and sophisticated art with which he began and the gradual replacement of formal rhetorical devices by methods of composition based upon close observation of life and the exercise of the creative imagination.<sup>11</sup>)

But both passages hint rather too broadly at what is not true, because it is only half true. Manly's contention here is disputed by Naunin who claims that, so far from Chaucer discarding rhetorical devices, he always used them, and some of them appear more often in his later than his earlier work.<sup>12</sup> My own position is that Chaucer transcended but did not discard the rhetorical principles and the technique he had in his early work. (In fact the only important form that Chaucer used after his visit to Italy that he had not used before was the heroic couplet.) This he employed late in life and for the first time in *The Legend of Good Women*, the first text of which was probably written in 1385 long after he had absorbed all that he was going to absorb from Italy. (And the heroic couplet

<sup>9</sup> Tatlock, J. S. P., *The Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works* (Chaucer Society, 1907), p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Manly, John Matthews, *Chaucer and the Rhetoricians* (London, 1926), p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Naunin, Traugott, *Der Einfluss der mittelalterlichen Rhetorik auf Chaucers Dichtung* (Bonn, 1929), pp. 53-54.

could have been found in French verse by Chaucer at the outset of his career.) Skeat points out that he might well have borrowed it from Machaut.<sup>13</sup> And the *laissez* of French epic poetry often enough strongly suggest the heroic couplet.

(Then, too, Chaucer's decasyllabic line is clearly French in origin. He used it in his *A.B.C.*, which was written in the ballade octave, and in the *Compleynt unto Pite*, which is in rime royal. These are accepted by everybody as being his two earliest extant poems, and probably written before 1368, even if that is ever proved to be the date of his first Italian visit.<sup>14</sup> Such things clearly belong to "the trouvère manner of the French.") And just as these forms were not abandoned after Italy, so Italy gave Chaucer no new poetic form, however much credit should be allowed to its influence upon his versification.

(The claim is still sometimes made that *ottava rima* is the base of rime royal.<sup>15</sup> It is perfectly true that by abstracting a line from *ottava rima* you obtain the Chaucerian stanza. So also it is true that by adding an alexandrine to the Monk's Tale stanza you obtain the Spenserian stanza (which is a matter to be discussed in the last chapter of this study). But to put the issue in such terms is to confuse it.)

In the chapters on the ballade we have seen already how Chaucer could have found in Machaut, Deschamps and others a decasyllabic seven-line stanza rhymed *a, b, a, b, b, c, c*, which he normally used as his own ballade stanza. We have seen also that he had turned that ballade stanza into rime royal early in life. He accordingly had his most characteristic verse form before going to Italy. Baldwin nevertheless says: "His adaptation of the Italian stanza in the *Parlement of Foules* opened the way towards that technical mastery which is one of the characteristic achievements of his nar-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Skeat, W. W., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, III, 383, and note 2 on the same page.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Furnivall, Frederick James, *Trial Forewords to my "Parallel Text Edition of Chaucer's Minor Poems"* (Chaucer Society, 1871), pp. 12-13, 31. His conclusions on these points have been accepted in the main by all subsequent scholars, though the dates suggested by them range from 1366 to 1373. Traugott Naunin, in a folder attached to his *Der Einfluss der mittelalterlichen Rhetorik auf Chaucers Dichtung* (Bonn, 1929), tabulates no less than thirty-nine proposed chronologies for Chaucer's poems.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Borghesi, P., *op. cit.*, p. 24.

rative,"<sup>16</sup> ignoring altogether the much earlier *Compleynt unto Pite.* (There was, however, nothing to prevent Chaucer, even with rime royal at his command before going to Italy) (or at any rate, if we are to suppose a visit in 1368, before being acquainted with Italian literature), (afterwards taking up *ottava rima*, the fitness of which for spightly narrative he must have recognized). But, as ten Brink says, "Chaucer remained loyal to the seven-line stanza even after he had become acquainted with the Italian ottave-rime in Boccaccio's epics."<sup>17</sup> That he did so is a most significant fact. (And it would be well to show how easy it would have been for Chaucer to have taken over the form as well as the content from Boccaccio in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Here, by way of example is a stanza from Boccaccio.)

Io vo' con teco partir queste pene,  
Se dar non posso a tua noia conforto,  
Perciocchè coll' amico si conviene  
Ogni cosa partir, noia e diporto;  
Ed io mi credo che tu sappia bene  
Se io t' ho amato a diritto ed a torto,  
E s' io farei per te ogni gran fatto,  
E fosse che volesse ed in qual atto.<sup>18</sup>

This Chaucer renders into rime royal:

I wole parten with thee al thy peyne,  
If it be so I do thee no comfort,  
As it is freendes right, sooth for to seyne,  
To entreparten wo, as glad desport.  
I have, and shal, for trewe or fals report,

<sup>16</sup> Baldwin, Charles Sears, *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic (to 1400)*, New York, 1928, p. 284. Bernhard ten Brink, states the case correctly "This stanza occurs in O.Fr. and Provençal art-poetry, and probably developed according to the following scheme *ab ab aab* (thus in Bernart de Ventadorn), *ab ab baa*, *ab ab bcc*. Although not its creator, Chaucer may claim the stanza as his own. The skill with which he constructs it and the extent to which he uses it have given it a far greater significance than it originally possessed. The English poet has set his own peculiar seal upon the system, especially by the consistency with which he employs a new rime for the last couplet, whereby the structure becomes more clearly outlined and the conclusion more defined." *The Language and Metre of Chaucer* (London, 1901), pp. 255-256.

<sup>17</sup> *The Language and Metre of Chaucer*, p. 256.

<sup>18</sup> Griffin, Nathaniel Edward and Myrick, Arthur Beckwith, *The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio* (Philadelphia, 1929), Part II, stanza 5.

In wrong and right y-loved thee al my lyve;  
Hyd not thy wo from me, but telle it blyve.<sup>19</sup>

Or again Boccaccio's *ottava rima*:

Poi ciò pensando, giva soggiugnendo:  
Lunga hai fatta di me amor la storia,  
S' io non mi voglio a me gir nascondendo,  
E 'l ver ben mi ridice la memoria;  
Dove ch' io vada o stia, s' io bene intendo,  
Ben mille segni della tua vittoria  
Discerno, c' hai avuta trionfante  
Di me, che schernfi già ciascuno amante.<sup>20</sup>

{ is successfully adapted as rime royal, and, as Kissner has pointed out, with some of the rhymes transferred from Italian to English in this case as in the other.<sup>21</sup> }

Thanne thoughte he thus, "O blisful lōrd Cupyde,  
Whanne I the proces have in my memorie,  
How thou me hast werreyed on every syde,  
*Men mighte a book make of it, lyk a storie.*  
What nede is thee to seke on me victorie,  
Sin I am thyn, and hoolly at thy wille?  
What joye hastow thyn owene folk to spille?"<sup>22</sup>

If Chaucer avoided using *ottava rima* it could only have been because he preferred rime royal. The reason for this preference is explained by ten Brink: }

{ The ottave-rime, which is only differentiated from the seven-line stanza by the interpolation of a verse: *ab ab (a)b cc*, cannot, as regards harmonious proportion of the parts, sustain comparison with it: the ottave-rime contains four parts instead of three; the tripartite *frons* (Aufgesang) is far too long for the *cauda* (Abgesang).<sup>23</sup>

Whether or not this was the reason for Chaucer's failure to use *ot-*

<sup>19</sup> *Troilus and Criseyde*, I, stanza 85

<sup>20</sup> Griffin, N. E. and Myrick, A. B., *The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio*, Part v, stanza 56.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Kissner, Alfons, *Chaucer in seinen Beziehungen zur italienischen Literatur* (Bonn, 1867), pp. 15-16.

<sup>22</sup> *Troilus and Criseyde*, v, stanza 84.

<sup>23</sup> Ten Brink, B., *op. cit.*, p. 256. But George Herbert Cowling in "A Note on Chaucer's Stanza," *Review of English Studies*, II (1926), 311-317, points out that the tripartite rule was by no means uniformly observed by Chaucer. Cf. also Smith, Egerton, *The Principles of English Metre* (Oxford, 1923), p. 244.

*tava rima*, it is clear that he never felt any attraction towards it, or saw any reason for abandoning rime royal in its favor.

(It is, moreover, highly significant that though Chaucer came into contact with three of the most magnificent of verse forms: *ottava rima*, *terza rima* and the Sonnet (whose characteristic merits so accomplished a technician as Chaucer could not have failed to perceive), and though translating matter contained in these three forms, he nevertheless made no attempt to use the forms themselves.)

An apparent exception is found in the case of *terza rima*. Once, and only once so far as we know, and then only in a mood of casual experiment, Chaucer utilized this form. (This was of course in *A Complaynt to his Lady*, a poem which he is conceded to have written in 1373 or 1374. It is obviously a mere exercise in versification, and in it occurs his solitary attempt to see what he could do with Italian forms, after which he apparently decided that, however good they might be in themselves, and however suitable they might be to the work of other poets, they were not what he needed for his purpose.

(*A Complaynt to his Lady* opens with a couple of stanzas in rime royal; and then comes a somewhat feeble and diffident experiment in *terza rima*, concluding with a ten-line stanza rimed *a, a, b, a, a, b, c, d, d, c*.) It would be rash to assert that Chaucer had the sonnet form vaguely in mind here, and if he had, he must have been exercising with a vengeance, and a little out of due time, the later English *penchant* for modifying the sonnet. But it is clear that the last four lines could be considered half an octet, and that the first six suggest a sestet. (There is, moreover, a decided break between the first six and the last four lines of each stanza) which is exemplified in the illustration cited here:

My dere herte, and best beloved fo,  
Why lyketh yow to do me al this wo,  
What have I doon that greveth yow, or sayd,  
Burt for I serve and love yow and no mo?  
And whylst I live, I wol do ever so;  
And therfor, swete, ye beth nat evil apayd.  
For so good and so fair as [that] ye be  
Hit were [a] right gret wonder but ye hadde  
Of alle servants, bothe goode and badde;  
And leest worthy of alle hem, I am he.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *A Complaynt to his Lady*, 64-73.



It should, however, be noted that elsewhere he used stanza forms that had a somewhat similar plan, *a, a, b, a, a, b, b, c, c*,<sup>25</sup> and *a, a, b, a, a, b, b, a, b*.<sup>26</sup> These, however, seem to be mere variations upon the ballade stanza (*Womanly Noblesse* is a ballade); whereas it is difficult to see in the ten-line stanza of *A Complaynte to his Lady* any connection with the ballade formula.

To the question of Chaucer and the sonnet I must come in a moment. A concluding word should be said about *terza rima*. It was the one Italian form that Chaucer tried at all, and then only, so it would seem, to satisfy himself that it was not for him. For when he translated the Ugolino episode from the *Inferno* in his *Monk's Tale*, he cast it into ballade octaves.<sup>27</sup> This was the closest he could come to being "Dante in English."

It will be said at once that Chaucer was obliged to turn this passage from Dante into ballade octaves, since the rest of the *Monk's Tale* was in that form. But there was no reason why Chaucer was obliged to put it into the *Monk's Tale*. Had he wished to do so he might have made a separate tale of it, as for that matter he might have cast entirely different material into *terza rima*.

Still less was Chaucer attracted to *ottava rima*. For once again it must be said that the similarity between this form and rime royal is only accidental and superficial (the movement of the two strophes, considered as wholes, being utterly dissimilar), and that Chaucer had been writing in rime royal years before he gives the faintest indication of having read poetry in *ottava rima*. Yet Tyrwhitt, and others since his time, have thought Chaucer's neglect of *ottava rima* rather extraordinary. "Even," wrote this editor, "when he uses a Stanza of eight verses (as in the *Monk's Tale*) it is constituted very differently from the Italian Octave."<sup>28</sup> It is indeed. The only relation between the two stanza patterns is that each has eight lines. As we have seen, Chaucer wrote the *A.B.C.* (which in all probability is his earliest extant poem) almost certainly long before he had ever come across *ottava rima*. And the stanza of the *A.B.C.* (which is identical with that of the *Monk's Tale*) is nothing but the ballade octave removed from the restric-

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Complaynt of Mars*.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Womanly Noblesse*

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Monk's Tale*, 417-473.

<sup>28</sup> Tyrwhitt, Thomas, *The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer* (London, 1843), footnote 63, p. xl.

tions of the ballade. Just as rime royal used for the first time in *A Complaynt to his Lady* is nothing, as I have shown in an earlier chapter, but a fairly common variant of the ballade stanza similarly set free from the ballade.

The relation between the octave and the seven-line stanza is apparent. It is not proved by the fact that by dropping one line of the octave we get rime royal; for if that were all, the force of the argument would have to be admitted that the dropping of a line from *ottava rima* would also give us rime royal.<sup>29</sup> Rather the relationship is proved by the fact that both are ballade stanzas and had been used as such by Machaut and others long before Chaucer set pen to paper.

Finally there is the sonnet. Here, I confess, I am almost as puzzled as was Tyrwhitt over Chaucer's failure to use *ottava rima*. For while it is easy enough to see that Chaucer came to the conclusion that he could dispense with both *terza* and *ottava rima*, since he had in rime royal a pattern that suited his narratives better than either of these forms, it might have been supposed that he would have been glad of the sonnet pattern for other purposes. To the end of his life he occasionally wrote short amatory or reflective poems, and it would seem that for such work the fourteen lines of the sonnet would have been more convenient than the much more complicated and artificial pattern of the ballade. (It is not that one would have expected him to have discarded the ballade in favor of the sonnet, but to have used the sonnet as well as the ballade. But he never did.)

Yet he knew what a sonnet was, for in *Troilus and Criseyde*<sup>30</sup> he translated the one by Petrarch which begins "S' amor non è, che dunque è quel ch' io sento?"<sup>31</sup> Even had this been the only sonnet he ever encountered, that one sonnet would have sufficed to make the distinctive sonnet pattern perfectly clear to his mind. Trained as he was in set-forms, it is unthinkable that he could have failed to perceive the nature of a sonnet. But, as in the cases of *terza* and *ottava rima*, he decided that the form was not for him.

<sup>29</sup> T. R. Lounsbury points out with regard to rime royal that "from the Italian *ottava rima* it differs only by the omission of the fifth line" (*Studies in Chaucer*, III, 304). But he is careful not to commit himself to the proposition that it originated from *ottava rima*.

<sup>30</sup> I, 400-420

<sup>31</sup> Bellorini, Edigio, *Francesco Petrarca, Le Rime* (Turin, 1924), I, 189.

Perhaps this may be taken as a further bit of evidence against the supposition that Chaucer met Petrarch while in Italy. For had the two poets come into personal contact, the Italian could hardly have failed to impress upon the Englishman the possibilities of the sonnet form. Lacking such explanation, Chaucer, while he must have recognized the distinctiveness of the sonnet pattern, might well have failed to understand the range of its power.

It would seem, however, that Chaucer was acquainted with only a few isolated scraps of Petrarch's work. The Clerk does refer to

Fraunceys Petrark, the laureat poete,  
 . . . whos rethoryke sweete  
 Enlumined al Itaille of poetrye;<sup>32</sup>

and concludes with further acknowledgements:

Therfor Petrark wryteth  
 This storie, which with heigh style he endyteth.<sup>33</sup>

But the "heigh style" was that of Petrarch's Latin prose translation of Boccaccio's tenth *novella* of the tenth day in his *Decameron*. Of Petrarch's Italian sonnets, or for that matter of Petrarch's Latin epic, Chaucer, as likely as not, knew either slightly or not at all.<sup>34</sup>

The vagueness of Chaucer's attributions is well known. Thus in the *Monk's Tale* the story of Zenobia is credited to Petrarch, and the reader who would like to hear more about it is told:

Let him un-to my maister Petrark go.<sup>35</sup>

The attribution of course should have been to Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum* and *De Claris Mulieribus*. And the curious fact, which has been explained in several ingenious ways, is that, though Chaucer borrows freely from Boccaccio, he never once mentions his name, and even instances "Lollius" as his main source for the story of *Troilus and Criseyde*.<sup>36</sup> All this has been accounted for on the ground of Chaucer's famous "slyness"; but it is easier to believe that it points to a somewhat fragmentary knowledge of the authors to whom he refers. It is possible, and, judging from the

<sup>32</sup> *Clerk's Prologue*, 31-33.

<sup>33</sup> *Clerk's Tale*, 1091-1092.

<sup>34</sup> But cf. Hendrickson, George Lincoln, "Chaucer and Petrarch," *Modern Philology*, IV (1906), 179-192.

<sup>35</sup> *Monk's Tale*, 335.

<sup>36</sup> *Troilus and Criseyde*, I, 394, V, 1653, and again in *The Hous of Fame*, III, 378.

slight use made by Chaucer of Petrarch's writings, even likely that Chaucer's knowledge of them was slight, however fully he was aware of the reputation enjoyed by Petrarch in Italy.

Be this as it may, it is interesting to observe what Chaucer did with the one sonnet by Petrarch we positively know him to have read: he turned it into rime royal. He did not turn it into a ballade in the way that he introduced that most exquisite of all his lyrics *Hyd, Absolon, thy gilte tresses clere*<sup>37</sup> into the *Legend*. But there was a good reason for his not doing so. In *The Legend of Good Women* the body of the poem is written in heroic couplets, and the ballade is openly an interpolation, as is also the masterly constructed *Envoy de Chaucer* that brings the *Clerk's Tale* to a close. The case of the translation of Petrarch's sonnet was quite another matter. The difference between three stanzas of rime royal and a seven-line stanza ballade would have been so slight that it was hardly worth Chaucer's while to make the further effort that would have been called for by a strict ballade.<sup>38</sup>

And, after all, Chaucer would undoubtedly have considered his translation of Petrarch's sonnet a ballade. For, as we have already seen, his *Balade of Complaynt* is identical in form with his rendering of Petrarch: three stanzas of rime royal, with a different set of rhymes in each, and without either refrain or *envoi*. And, as we shall see from examples to be cited in a later chapter, a still looser view of the ballade came to be accepted after Chaucer's time.

We are now in a position, I think, to conclude this part of the argument. Despite Tatlock, it is not correct to say that "Till he went to Italy, what he lacked was a poetic form."<sup>39</sup> On the contrary, as has been shown here, he had before going to Italy a command of the ballade, of rime royal and the ballade octet.<sup>40</sup> Though after his visits he translated work written by Boccaccio in *ottava rima*, by Dante in *terza rima*, and in sonnet form by Petrarch, he

<sup>37</sup> *Legend of Good Women*, Text B., 249-269.

<sup>38</sup> The fact that Petrarch's sonnet was introduced in this way into a rime royal poem may account for Chaucer's tactful avoidance of the sonnet form. But it would explain only this particular avoidance of it. Why did he not use the sonnet form at some other time?

<sup>39</sup> *The Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works*, p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> Though probably none of the extant ballades was written prior to the Italian visit, we should have to presume the previous writing of ballades from the existence of poems in the ballade octave and rime royal, since the ballade is the basis of both.

avoided completely these poetic patterns. And this could have been for only one reason: that the forms already at his command, and in particular rime royal, sufficed.<sup>41</sup> His craftsmanship was already assured, fixed, and perfectly adapted to his purposes.

*The Parlement of Foules* opens with the line

The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne.<sup>42</sup>

And assuredly Chaucer never ceased throughout his life to learn. But with the notable exception of his subsequent use of heroic couplets, there was no drastic change in his verse pattern after he had gone to Italy. And certainly Chaucer did not derive heroic couplets from Italy.

He did, it is true, after his Italian visit now and then employ six-, nine- and ten-line stanzas. But his best and most characteristic work is not in these stanzas. And with the exception of his experimental use of *terza rima* in *A Complaynt to his Lady*, and the possible influence of the sonnet form upon the ten-line stanza of the same poem (points already discussed in this chapter) it cannot be shown that Italy had anything to do with the matter.

We must remember that when Chaucer first came under the Italian influence he was a man of nearly thirty-five. In the fourteenth century many a man as old as that had to be considered middle-aged. Moreover, during no period of literary history were poets in their middle thirties apt to make experiments. By then they have mastered their art, if they ever mastered it, and are content to do what they can with their powers along the lines they have found most satisfactory to themselves.

What Chaucer took from Italy was a great deal; a broadening experience and a wealth of new material, which, because he was already a matured and accomplished craftsman (and only because of that reason) he understood how to use to the best advantage. Almost to the end there was development, but with the exception of his hitting upon the heroic couplet, there was no drastic change. It may be said in the most positive fashion that Chaucer did not derive from Italy any new verse forms, though it is clear enough

<sup>41</sup> Unless we are going to say that Chaucer did not use these forms because he did not feel equal to using them successfully,

<sup>42</sup> But that poem, too, is in rime royal.

that after his Italian visits he used his old forms with greater skill and freedom.

There has been, however, an attempt to show that the idea of using the decasyllabic line came to Chaucer because he had read the Italian poets. Miss Hammond, after summing up the theories, expresses her belief that Italy must get the credit.<sup>43</sup>

As baldly stated the proposition is demonstrably false. The *A.B.C.* opens with

Almighty and al merciabe quene,

and is written throughout in decasyllabics, as is also the *Compleynnt unto Pite*. But it is true that for his longer early poems, such as the translation of the *Roman de la Rose* and *The Book of the Duchesse*, Chaucer relies upon octosyllabic couplets. Not until *The Parlement of Foules* did he use rime royal for a long poem and not until *The Legend of Good Women* heroic couplets.<sup>44</sup> That he never would have had the inspiration to write these poems had he not gone to Italy is probably perfectly true, as it is certainly true that had he not gone to Italy he would have not found material for *Troilus and Criseyde*. And, in the same way the power of seizing the English subject of *The Canterbury Tales* may never have come to him had it not been for the rich experience of Italy that revealed Chaucer's greatness to himself. But for all that he did not get a new literary technique from Italy, and specifically he did not get the heroic couplet from that source.

It is now necessary to indicate some of the theories regarding the introduction of the decasyllabic line into English poetry, and Chaucer's use of it. Schipper cites specimens of it from thirteenth century English verse.<sup>45</sup> Saintsbury supports this view, and notes of Robert Manning: "What is most interesting is the constant settling down and contraction of the verse to decasyllabics, and even

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Hammond, E. P., *Chaucer, a bibliographical manual* (New York, 1908), pp. 486-487.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Legouis, Emile, "Where Chaucer, under Italian influence—and more especially that of Boccaccio—really separates himself from his first masters, is in the use of a decasyllabic stanza instead of the monotonous octosyllabic couplet. This renders his touch at once broader and more vigorous, but still an impression of conventionality and artificiality remains, if indeed it is not increased." *Geoffrey Chaucer* (London, 1913), p. 83.

<sup>45</sup> Schipper, Jakob, *History of English Versification* (Oxford, 1910), pp. 212-218.

to something that is almost, if not altogether, a decasyllabic couplet."<sup>46</sup> Ten Brink, on the other hand, says of one of the instances cited by Schipper that he was "unable to convince [himself] that this is a genuine instance of a metre which—whether in origin or character—may be identified with Chaucer's verse, though in isolated instances it seems to be an exact equivalent."<sup>47</sup> And Kaluza sweepingly denies that the measure was known in English literature before Chaucer.<sup>48</sup> The truth would seem to be that for some time before Chaucer English poetry had been fumbling in the direction of the heroic line, and even of the heroic couplet, and would inevitably have reached it eventually even without Chaucer. But it is possible to object to nearly every case of this that may be cited from the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, on the ground that the metre is not perfect. All that has to be established, however, is a tendency in the direction of the true decasyllabic line (and the couplet), and of this there can be no serious doubt.<sup>49</sup>

French poetry had very early employed the measure. The first bit of French verse of which we have record of its being recited upon English soil<sup>50</sup> was that excerpt from the *Song of Roland* which Taillefer chanted<sup>51</sup> as the Normans rode forward to attack the

<sup>46</sup> Saintsbury, George, *A History of English Prosody* (London, 1923), I, 113-114.

<sup>47</sup> Ten Brink, B., *The Language and Metre of Chaucer*, p. 214.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Kaluza, Max, *A Short History of English Versification* (London, 1911), pp. 239-240.

<sup>49</sup> Take for example this couplet from Richard Rolle of Hampole's *The Prick of Conscience* (Morris and Skeat, *Specimens of Early English* [Oxford, 1879], II, 111).

The bughes er the armes with the handes,  
And the legges with the fete that standes (680-681).

Ten Brink points out that in *The Legend of Good Women* ("the seyntes legend of Cupyde") Chaucer may well have had in mind the Southern Cycle of M.E. legends which were composed in alexandrine couplets; and that the idea might have well come to him from this source of using heroic couplets. *The Language and Metre of Chaucer*, p. 253.

<sup>50</sup> But not, we may be sure the first bit of French verse actually to have been recited. For some time before the Conquest many Normans were in England, and their culture was popular at the court

<sup>51</sup>

Taillefer, qui mult bien chantout,  
Sor un cheual qui tost alout,  
Deuant le duc alout chantant  
De Karlemaigne e de Rollant  
E d'Oliuer e des uassals,

army of Harold Godwin at Hastings. It might be as well to insert here the opening *laisse* of the epic:

Carles li reis, nostre emperere magnes,  
Set anz tuz pleins ad estet en Espaigne:  
Tresqu'en la mer cunquist la tere altaigne.  
N'i ad castel ki devant lui remaigne;  
Mur ne citet n'i est remés a fraindre,  
Fors Sarraguce, ki est en une muntaigne.  
Li reis Marsilie la tient, ki Deu nen aimet.  
Mahumet sert e Apollin recleimet:  
Nes poet garder que mals ne l'i ateignet.<sup>52</sup>

There is the French heroic line which was perfectly familiar to Englishmen and ready for English use. And if the *laisse* binds together rhyme and assonance, it is perfectly clear that the poet uses rhyme whenever he can get it and falls back on assonance when rhymes get scarce. It is not difficult to see how such verse suggests and implies the couplet.

As has already been noted, Skeat suggests that Chaucer may have got the heroic couplet as he got so much else from Machaut, and quotes a poem by that author in that pattern.<sup>53</sup> But there is no proof of this, and it is not necessarily the case. Chaucer being, after all, a great poet and literary artist, might conceivably have got the idea of the heroic couplet out of his own head. In his earliest extant poems we find the decasyllabic line. And it is worth noting that, in translating *Le Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine*, written about 1330 by Guillaume de Guilleville in twelve-line octosyllabic stanzas, Chaucer transformed it into decasyllabic octaves. Surely it is as likely as not that he combined two ideas: that of the heroic line he had long employed, and that of the octosyllabic couplets in which he had written *The Romaunt of the Rose* and *The Book of the Duchesse*. As Saintsbury very pertinently points out: "He had actually been writing heroic couplets for years at the close of each of his rhymes-royal."<sup>54</sup>

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Qui morurent en Renceuals.

(Andresen, Hugo, *Maistre Wace's Roman de Rou et des Ducs de Normandie* [Heilbronn, 1877-79], 8035-40.)

<sup>52</sup> Bédier, Joseph, *La Chanson de Roland* (Paris, 1922).

<sup>53</sup> Skeat, W. W., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, III, 383.

<sup>54</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, 163.



Tyrwhitt, however, suggests that Chaucer got his heroic line from Boccaccio.<sup>55</sup> And Miss Hammond, with a far greater wealth of critical material at her command, says the same thing, with greater emphasis and amplitude.

Far from regarding Chaucer's line, with Schipper, as the descendant of the Old English bipartite, heavily stressed verse; far from regarding it as akin to the French syllable-counting movement; far even from regarding it as the struggle and compromise of these two systems, I would see in Boccaccio and Dante the true instructors of Chaucer.<sup>56</sup>

The trouble with that statement, if it is read too literally, is that it simply ignores the fact that Chaucer had his heroic line before he ever set foot in Italy. But no doubt all that Miss Hammond meant to say is that Chaucer's decasyllabic line, as far as his more mature use of it is concerned, was modified by his reading of the Italian poets.<sup>57</sup> The possible, indeed probable, modifying influence of Italian poetry upon Chaucer's later versification has been repeatedly admitted in these pages. But this can be admitted only as a modifying influence.

Schipper pertinently points out that even in the *Compleynt unto Pite* the caesura is moveable, though not to the same extent as in the later poems.<sup>58</sup> Chaucer's freedom in this matter, therefore, might well have increased (though probably not to the same degree) had he never gone to Italy.

Moreover Licklider concludes:

Chaucer found a rigid caesura in the French decasyllable. Unconsciously, perhaps, he gave it in the English decasyllable the entirely inorganic character that it has held to the present day. The varying position of the caesura in the English decasyllable is,

<sup>55</sup> Tyrwhitt, T., *The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer*, pp. xxxix-xl.

<sup>56</sup> *Chaucer: a bibliographical manual*, p. 486.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 487. Robinson, F. N. (*The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* [Cambridge, Mass., 1933], p. 163) contents himself with saying that Chaucer's "persistent use of [the heroic line] must have been largely due to the *endecasillabi* of his Italian masters," while pointing out that the line was employed in his earliest short pieces. A brief but good discussion of Chaucer's heroic line (and especially of his heroic couplet) is in Raymond Macdonald Alden's *English Verse* (New York, 1929), pp. 177-179.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *History of English Versification*, p. 213n.

then, an indication, not solely of the poet's skill, but of the natural result of forcing a new and non-primitive rhythm upon a verse that still feels the strictly primitive rhythm of the Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>59</sup>

In other words, Chaucer was sensitive to the genius of the English language, and, though he learned from France and Italy, what he learned from these sources was mainly directed to making out of English poetry what its own nature intended it to be.<sup>60</sup> But I have no objection to ten Brink's statement of the case, where the conflicting views are reconciled, in so far as this is possible.<sup>61</sup> Nor should I wish to dispute Kissner's argument that, though Chaucer was a great master of form, and in this original, he could not have mastered his verses with the ease he did, because of the raw substance of the English language, (bei dem rauhen, spröden Material der englischen Sprache) had he not before him the Italian models.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Licklider, Albert Harp, *Chapters on the Metric of the Chaucerian Tradition* (Baltimore, 1910), pp. 128-129.

<sup>60</sup> William Paton Ker, after remarking that what Chaucer learned from Boccaccio was the art of construction (p. 84), points out that Gower in his *rime royal* shows that "he followed the same laws as Chaucer, particularly in his neglect of the French and Provençal rule—the obligatory pause after the fourth syllable . . . Chaucer does not recognize this as binding, nor do the Italians. The agreement in practice between the English and Italian poets is not due to borrowing, but to natural affinity. Gower apparently knew no Italian, and his usage is the same as Chaucer's. Even in his French decasyllabic verse in the *Balades* he admits many lines that are incorrect as French verse and right according to the Chaucerian principle." *Essays on Medieval Literature* (London, 1905), pp. 125-126.

<sup>61</sup> "Heroic verse occurs in older M.E. poetry only in such isolated instances . . . that to Chaucer would be due the credit of having introduced it into English literature, even if his treatment of it did not differ essentially from that of his predecessors (or predecessor?). Chaucer first made use of this metre in lyric poetry, not until a later period in the epic. The earliest poem in which he employed it, the *Compleynte to Pitee*, was probably composed before the Italian journey of 1372-73 . . . and thus we can hardly escape the conclusion that in the first instance this verse was an imitation of the French *vers décasyllabe*. Yet it was in Italy that he first became thoroughly alive to the significance of this metre . . . Of yet greater significance is the fact that Chaucer's heroic verse deviates in all those points from the French *vers décasyllabe* in which the Italian *endecasillabo* deviates from the common model, and approximates as nearly to the verse of Dante and Boccaccio as Germanic metre can approach Romance. Incidentally we may also note that the heroic verse in the *Compleynte to Pitee* is far more closely allied to the French *vers décasyllabe* than for instance, in *Troilus* or the *Canterbury Tales*." *The Language and Metre of Chaucer*, p. 213.

<sup>62</sup> Kissner, Alfons, *Chaucer in seinen Beziehungen zur italienischen Literatur*, p. 78.

In summary, therefore, I should say that the decasyllabic line (though to be found here and there in English poetry before Chaucer) was nevertheless Chaucer's great innovation; that he borrowed this for his own use from French, not English, sources, particularly from the ballades; that after reading Boccaccio and Dante he became freer in his use of it; that even before reading them he displayed a greater freedom in the matter of the caesura than was found in French verse; and that the development which actually did occur, though aided by Chaucer's practice, would sooner or later have occurred in any event, for the simple reason that it was inherent in the English language. What Chaucer showed was the tact of the consummate literary artist: instinctively he performed even before he perceived. In a word, the development of English verse was natural and not artificial.

In Italy he got the hint he needed. So much may be granted. But to grant it is to throw fresh weight upon the fact that however much Chaucer in maturity may have modified the rhythm of his heroic line, the heroic line was his from the start. Moreover, with all the riches of Italian stanza patterns to choose from, he chose none of them, but kept to the form he had already moulded to his own purpose: rime royal.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CHAUCERIAN STANZA OR RIME ROYAL

A CONSIDERATION of the hundred years and more during which rime royal dominated English poetry—a domination far more absolute than that of heroic couplets during the eighteenth century—must be deferred until the next chapter. Little more is proposed in this section than a consideration of the confusion which resulted in the Chaucerian stanza coming to be known by the name which since the sixteenth century has been fastened upon it.

In the chapter on the ballade it has been shown that though Chaucer's general practice was to write ballades not in the octave of the rubric but in stanzas of seven heroic lines rhymed *a, b, a, b, b, c, c*, this stanza did not originate with him. It was merely one of the variants upon the standard pattern, and one which, though not common, was not exactly rare.<sup>1</sup>

Yet Chaucer must be given full credit for seeing what could be

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, however, that the French and Provençal poets who used the seven-line stanza often rimed it *a, b, a, b, b, a, a*, or *a, b, a, b, a, a, b*, or *a, b, b, c, c, a, a*, or *a, b, b, a, a, c, c*. An example of the last of these forms is the following by Peirol d'Alvernha.

Pois entremes me sui, de far chanson  
E m deu gardar qe fals motz non entenda;  
E, s' eu dic ren qe midons en grat prenda,  
Ben mi sera rendut bon guizardon  
Et agra 'n tort, si mos chant non es bon,  
Per qe so me dona l' art et engenh  
Et so q' eu fatz no deu metre en desdenh.

Delius, Nikolaus, *Ungedruckte Provenzalische Lieder* (Bonn, 1853), p. 41. But there should be noted the poem by Folquet de Marseilles which Tyrwhitt pointed out as the only instance of a stanza rhymed as Chaucer rhymed his, though (as we have seen) it is far from being unique.

Amor, merces non moira tan soven,  
Qa ja m podetz viatz del tot aucire,  
Qar viure m fai et morir mesclamen  
Et enaissi dobl' en mi mon martire,  
Pero m' etz mortz, vos soi hom e servire,  
E' l servicis esme mil tant plus bos,  
Qe de nulh altr' aver rics guierdos.

*Ibid.*, p. 28. Both of these poems are closely related to the ballade. In the French ballade the Folquet de Marseilles stanza occurs more frequently than in Provençal.

done with the seven-line ballade stanza after it had been set free from the ballade restrictions. In some of his ballades, as we have seen, he threw away all the characteristic features of the pattern except the convention of confining the poem to three stanzas. But as the extant poems in which he did so (and let us take the *Balade of Complaynt* as a case in point) are probably late work, written long after he had invented and used rime royal, we cannot affirm that they must be the connecting link between the ballade and rime royal. It may well be that there was no connecting link, and that Chaucer went at a single stride from one form to the other.

All that he had to do was to discard the rules regulating the number of stanzas, the refrain, the *envoi*, the address to the Prince, and the same set of rhymes maintained from stanza to stanza (and all this would have been impossible in a long poem, as well as intolerably monotonous if possible): and at once he had rime royal.

This was of prime importance not only in Chaucer's own development, but, as we shall see, to the general development of English versification. The most brilliant and supple medium for narrative poetry—one superior in many ways even to the heroic couplet—was now at Chaucer's command. And it might be noted that while he used the couplet for racy characterization and indecorous story telling, he never regarded rime royal as appropriate for anything except a noble subject. This feeling about the matter did not make him exclude humor from poems written in rime royal, but it did make him exclude the improper.

It was not only the seven-line ballade stanza that Chaucer set free from the restraints of the ballade pattern; he did the same thing with the ballade octave. The *A.B.C.* written at about the same time as the *Complaynt unto Pite* (which is in rime royal) is in heroic verse rhymed *a, b, a, b, b, c, b, c*. But this was obviously inferior to rime royal for narrative purposes. If Chaucer used it again in the *Monk's Tale* (for which reason it is usually known as the Monk's Tale stanza, though it was the form of the earlier *A.B.C.*) it may have been by way of indicating the Monk's prosi-ness. At all events Chaucer tired of it, and made the Knight cut the matter short by bursting out with,

Good sir, namore of this!<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Canterbury Tales*, B. 3957.

Yet even after having invented these two stanzas (or rather after having liberated them from the ballade) Chaucer did not for some time fully perceive what an opportunity had come his way. He had his instrument, but nothing adequate to use it upon. The *Compleynt unto Pite* gave little indication of the glorious future awaiting rime royal. He continued to use octosyllabic couplets for his longer and more ambitious poems. It was not until he went to Italy and found there a new stimulation and new material (but not a new technique) that it dawned on him that great things could be done with the stanza he had invented. Then he gave us the *Prioress's Tale*, the *Clerk's Tale* (which I must confess I have never found dull) and the *Second Nun's Tale*, which followed the triumphs of *The Parlement of Foules* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. In all these poems rime royal proved itself an admirable medium. But in the first and last of those mentioned (the one with its charming air of innocence, the other with its passion and pathos) rime royal was proved to be an unsurpassable pattern for narrative poetry. Here the form of the poem is as inseparable from its context as the matter of *The Faerie Queene* is inseparable from the Spenserian stanza, than which there can be no higher praise.

It may be said, however, at this point that rime royal (which, as I shall attempt to show later, was the basis of the Spenserian stanza) is superior to the Spenserian stanza for narration. Nobody can consider the story of *The Faerie Queene* as exactly spirited. The decoration which it permits is what Spenser had his eye on. And those who have used the Spenserian stanza have not achieved in it any striking narrative effects. Keats in *The Eve of St Agnes* is as much concerned with decoration, and as little concerned with his tenuous plot, as was Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*. And Shelley in *Adonais* makes the stanza the vehicle of his spiritual exaltation.

On the other hand, despite the suffocating dreariness of so much of the rime royal written during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the pattern is still highly effective as far as narrative poetry is concerned. This Morris later proved in *The Earthly Paradise*. This Masfield has proved again in our own day. Indeed the Laureate in *Dauber* has given to rime royal a new movement, corresponding to the surge of the sea:

They stood there by the rail while the swift ship  
Tore on out of the tropics, straining her sheets,

Whitening her trackway to a milky strip,  
 Dim with green bubbles and twisted water-meets,  
 Her clacking tackle tugged at pins and cleats,  
 Her great sails bellied stiff, her great masts leaned:  
 They watched how the seas struck and burst and greened.<sup>3</sup>

But rime royal never achieved more beautiful effects than it did in the hands of the first poet to employ the form. And to indicate the various poetical moods and matters for which it is eminently appropriate, I shall set out here a few samples of it taken from Chaucer. There is no need for any comment. The range of rime royal is perfectly apparent in the quotations, which might be multiplied a hundredfold.

A garden saw I, ful of blosmy bowes  
 Upon a river, in a grene mede,  
 Ther as that swetnesse evermore y-now is,  
 With floures whyte, blewe, yelow, and rede;  
 And colde welle-stremes, no-thing dede,  
 That swommen ful of smale fisshes lighte,  
 With finnes rede and scales silver-brighte<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Among thise children was a widwes sone,  
 A litel clergeon, seven yeer of age,  
 That day by day to scole was his wone,  
 And eek also, wher-as he saugh th' image  
 Of Cristes moder, hadde he in usage,  
 As him was taught, to knele adoun and seye  
 His *Ave Marie*, as he goth by the weye.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

His helm to-hewen was in twenty places,  
 That by a tissew heng, his bak bihinde,  
 His sheld to-dashed was with swerdes and maces,  
 In which men mighte many an arwe finde  
 That thirled hadde horn and nerf and rinde,  
 And ay the peple cryde, 'here cometh our joye,  
 And, next his brother, holdere up of Troye!'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Masefield, John, *Dauber* (London, 1913), p. 2. It is probably to be expected that some time in the distant future it will be a subject of solemn investigation as to the source from which Masefield derived the movement of *Dauber*.

<sup>4</sup> *Parlement of Foules*, 183-189.

<sup>5</sup> *Prioress's Tale*, 50-56.

<sup>6</sup> *Troilus and Criseyde*, II, stanza 92.

O paleys, whylom croune of houses alle,  
 Enlumined with sonne of alle blisse!  
 O ring, fro which the ruby is out-falle,  
 O cause of wo, that cause hast been of lisse!  
 Yet, sin I may no bet, fayn wolde I kisse  
 Thy colde dores, dorste I for this route;  
 And fare-wel shryne, of which the seynt is oute!<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

And ner he com, and seyde, 'how stont it now  
 This mery morwe, nece, how can ye fare?'  
 Criseyde answerde, 'never the bet for yow,  
 Fox that ye been, god yeve your herte care!  
 God helpe me so, ye caused al this fare,  
 Trow I', quod she, 'for alle your wordes whyte;  
 O! who-so seeth you knoweth yow ful lyte!'

With that she gan hir face for to wrye  
 With the shete, and wex for shame al reed;  
 And Pandarus gan under for to pryde,  
 And seyde, 'nece, if that I shal ben deed,  
 Have here a swerd, and smyteth of myn heed.'  
 With that his arm al sodeynly he thriste  
 Under hir nekke, and at the laste hir kiste.<sup>8</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

A nightingale, upon a cedre grene,  
 Under the chambre-wal ther as she lay  
 Ful loude sang ayein the mone shene,  
 Paraunter, in his briddes wyse, a lay  
 Of love, that made hir herte fresh and gay,  
 That herkned she so longe in good entente,  
 Til at the laste the dede sleep hir hente.<sup>9</sup>

To comment upon such varied loveliness—which contains almost all of Chaucer's poetry in epitome—would involve writing at length upon the special flavor of his tenderness, simplicity, complexity, roguishness, brilliance, color and power. It is enough to cite them, for they amply prove how perfectly fitted to Chaucer's poetic genius was his stanza form.

An injustice has been done him by calling his stanza rime royal. And because this has arisen out of confusion and error, it would be well to examine the matter.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, v, stanza 79.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, III, stanzas 224 and 225.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, II, stanza 132.



MacCracken called attention to the fact that the *New English Dictionary* "perpetuated an error which seems to have gone uncorrected in print."<sup>10</sup> That error appearing there under *Ballade* was that ballade royal or rime royal took its name from the use of it made by King James I of Scotland.<sup>11</sup>

MacCracken's article confutes the error very decisively, yet because it nevertheless persists and also because there is something to add to the argument presented in *Modern Language Notes*, I come to a discussion of the point.

We have seen how Chaucer (or it may have been only his scribes) sometimes entitled his balades "envoys" or "compleynts." Miss Cohen, surveying the practice of the time, decides: "We shall hold those Middle English poems to be *ballades* which are composed of three stanzas with refrain."<sup>12</sup> That is broad in all conscience, yet hardly broad enough for Chaucer, and not nearly broad enough for some of his successors. His *Balade of Compleynt* has no refrain, and is merely three stanzas of rime royal. But where Chaucer at least clung to the idea that a ballade should have no more than three stanzas (unless a fourth were added by way of *envoi*) later poets considered almost any poem in rime royal a ballade. The terms *ballade* and *rime royal* came to be practically synonymous.

A new term was at an early date equated with them: *ballade royal*. While it is true that Chaucer never used this term himself, and that when he spoke in his poems of a ballade he meant precisely that (though his understanding of what constituted a ballade was broad),<sup>13</sup> we yet find attached to the title of *Lak of Stedfastnesse*, which is one of the strictest of his poems in the form, the explanation in one of the manuscripts: "Balade Royal made by our Laureal poete Albyon in hees laste yeares." Chaucer himself never used the term *Ballade Royal*, but it is clear that it soon came to be used. For the same Manuscript which contains this description (Shirley's MS. Trinity College, Cambridge R. 3. 20, made only

<sup>10</sup> MacCracken, Henry Noble, "King James' Claim to Rhyme Royal," *Modern Language Notes*, xxiv (1909), 31.

<sup>11</sup> The statement of the *New English Dictionary* (1, 639 [Oxford, 1888]) runs "The name originated in the fact that King James I of Scotland composed the *King's Quair* 1423, in 7-line stanzas of structure *a b a b b c c*. The *Ballad Royal* of James I of England had an additional *b* line between the two in *c*."

<sup>12</sup> *The Ballade*, p. 224.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Legend of Good Women*, B. Text, 270, 539, 555.

about a generation after Chaucer's death) uses also the terms *Balade moult Bon et Ryal* and *Balade Ryal de saine counsyle*.

We have here, however, only a carelessness about precise nomenclature, and not any confusion as to the form of the ballade. In the same way many a lyric written during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was called a sonnet, which was not a sonnet at all.<sup>14</sup> Even Collins heads an eight-line common-metre song of his in the same fashion.<sup>15</sup>

To take an analogous case: Swinburne, when translating Villon, or when composing ballades of his own, invariably used the term "ballad," though no man ever lived who better understood the difference between a ballad and a ballade. Fortunately these terms are now clearly understood to be entirely distinct; but during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries there was a good deal of confusion about the terms ballade and rime royal, though it was not until the sixteenth century that the term rime (or rhythm) royal was coined. Until then ballade and ballade royal meant the same thing—and that thing was rime royal.

Gower, Chaucer's contemporary, however, uses the term ballade correctly. His *Cinkante Balades*, written in French, are true ballades, though, like Chaucer, he sometimes used a stanza rhymed *a, b, a, b, b, c, b, c* and sometimes a stanza rhymed *a, b, a, b, b, c, c*. Nevertheless Quixley, who translated some of Gower's ballades, writes of the *Traictié*:

Gower it made in frenshe with grete studie  
In balades ryale.<sup>16</sup>

Long before Quixley, however, the confusion had begun. Lydgate, writing rime royal, describes it:

I took a penne and wroot in my maneer  
The said *balladys* as they stondyn heere.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> For example take Barnabe Googe's *Eglogs Epytaphes & Sonnettes*, 1563, edited by Arber (London, 1871), pp. 75-106. There is not a single sonnet among these pieces, yet no doubt the poet was well acquainted with the form of the sonnet.

<sup>15</sup> Blunden, Edmund, *The Poems of William Collins* (London, 1929), p. 135.

<sup>16</sup> MacCracken, Henry Noble, "Quixley's Ballades Royal," *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, xx (1908), 40.

<sup>17</sup> *MS Harley 2255*, f. 88b., *The Fifteen Joys of Our Lady*, quoted by MacCracken in *Modern Language Notes*, xxiv (1909), 32

And, again, John Hardyng in his *Chronicle*, writing rime royal, says:

Into balade I wyll it now translate.<sup>18</sup>

And to describe the pattern of that poem Lydgate writes:

Off ech of them the noumbre was Fifteene,  
Bothe of hir Ioyes and her adversitees,  
Ech after othir, and to that hevenlie queene  
I sauh Oon kneele deuoutly on his knees;  
A Pater-noster and ten tyme Auees  
In ordre he sayde [at thende] of ech ballade  
Cessyd nat, tyl he an eende made.<sup>19</sup>

The next step was the calling of rime royal "ballade royal."<sup>20</sup> Quixley has already been cited.<sup>21</sup> Let me add the witness of Stephen Hawes. Using rime royal he said of Lydgate:

O mayster Lydgate, the most dulcet sprynge  
Of famous rethoryke, with balade ryall,  
The chefe orygynall of my lernynge,  
What vayleth it on you for to call  
Me for to ayde, now in especyall,  
Sythen your body is now wrapte in cheste,  
I pray god to gyue your soule good reste.<sup>22</sup>

Finally King James I of England in his treatise on poetry, wrote: "For any heich and graue subiectis, specially drawin out of learnit authouris, vse this kynde of verse following, callit *Ballat Royal*, as"—and he proceeds to quote a stanza in heroic verse rhymed *a, b, a, b, b, c, b, c*.<sup>23</sup> It was not rime royal, but the ballade octave

<sup>18</sup> Ellis, Henry, *John Hardyng's Chronicle* (London, 1812), p. 16

<sup>19</sup> MacCracken, Henry Noble, *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, Early English Text Society, 1911 (Extra series 107), p. 269.

<sup>20</sup> But the term ballade was used as well at this time. On the same page on which is found the stanza of Hawes which is cited, he calls the stanza form he is using *bolade*. And Sir Thomas More also calls rime royal *balade*. Cf. Campbell, William Edward, *The English Works of Sir Thomas More, reproduced in facsimile from William Rastell's edition of 1557* (London and New York, 1931), I, 28.

<sup>21</sup> MacCracken argues that he wrote in 1402 ("Quixley's Ballades Royal," *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, XX [1908], 33-50).

<sup>22</sup> Mead, William Edward, *The Pastime of Pleasure by Stephen Hawes*, Early English Text Society, 1928, (No. 173), p. 56.

<sup>23</sup> *The Essayes of a Prentise, in the Divine Arte of Poesie, Edinburgh, 1585* (in Edward Arber's *English Reprints* [London, 1869], VIII, 67).

upon which rime royal was an improvement. King James called rime royal "The Troilus Stanza."

George Gascoigne in 1575 has this to say about the ballade:

There is also another kinde, called Ballade, and thereof are sundrie sortes: for a man may write ballade in a staffe of sixe lines, every line conteyning eighte or sixe sillables, whereof the firste and third, second and fourth do rime acrossse, and the fifth and sixth do rime together in conclusion. You may write also your ballad of tenne sillables, rimyng as before is declared; but these two were wont to be most comunly vsed in ballade, which propre name was (I thinke) deriued of this worde in Italian *Ballare*, whiche signifieth to daunce. And in deed those kinds of rimes serue beste for daunces or light matters.<sup>24</sup>

It will be seen that Gascoigne has a new understanding of what is meant by the term ballade;<sup>25</sup> but it is he who first used the term rime (or rhythm) royal:

Rythme royall is a verse of tenne sillables; and seuen such verses make a staffe, whereof the first and thirde lines do aunswer (acrosse) in like terminations and rime, the second, fourth, and fifth do likewise answere eche other in terminations, and the two last do combine and shut vp the Sentence: this hath bene called Rithme royall, and surely it is a royall kinde of verse, seruing best for graue discourses.<sup>26</sup>

The same critic calls Chaucer's heroic couplets "Riding Rime," and comments: "As this riding rime serueth most aptly to wryte a merie tale, so Rhythme royall is fittest for a graue discourse."<sup>27</sup> And George Puttenham, sums up Chaucer's couplets and rime royal by writing:

His meetre Heroicall of *Troilus* and *Cresseid* is very graue and stately, keeping the staffe of seuen, and the verse of ten, his other

<sup>24</sup> Gascoigne, George, *Certaine Notes of Instruction concerning the Making of Verse or Rhyme in English*. Included in G. Gregory Smith's *Elizabethan Critical Essays* (Oxford, 1904), I, 54-55. Gascoigne wrote as the preface to *The Grief of Joye* a poem along these lines. It consists of three stanzas rhymed a, b, a, b, c, c, and, though it has no refrain and uses different rhymes in each stanza, has an *envoi* addressed to Queen Elizabeth. Cunliffe, John William, *The Complete Works of George Gascoigne* (Cambridge, 1910), II, 516.

<sup>25</sup> True ballades had long since died out in England, though as late as the reign of Henry VIII the form was understood as we understand it, and Wyatt even wrote a three stanza poem in rime royal with a refrain.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, G. G., *op. cit.*, I, 54.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 56.

verses of the Canterbury tales be but riding ryme, neuerthelesse very well becomming the matter of that pleasaunt pilgrimage in which euery mans part is playd with much decency.<sup>28</sup>

These critics, it will be noticed, agree on one point: that rime royal is a noble, stately form of verse, suitable for grave subjects. This may have had something to do with "royal" being attached to the word "ballade" in describing it.

But there is a better reason for the word "royal" coming into the matter. As Guest pointed out, the name was probably derived from the French term *Chant Royal*.<sup>29</sup> And this explanation is accepted by MacCracken,<sup>30</sup> and by Miss Cohen who says: "The combination in English of *royal* with *ballade* is likely to have been due to the influence of the English *puy* enforced by contemporaneous French usage in the phrase *chant royal*."<sup>31</sup> Whether or not the *puy* had anything to do with it (which is unlikely in view of the fact that the term *ballade royal* does not occur until the dawn of the sixteenth century), it is highly probable that the *chant royal* did. Moreover, the ballade convention which called for an *envoi* addressed to the "Prince" (though this was not very strictly observed by English balladists) may have its bearing.

Of two things we may be certain: it was the rapid decline of the ballade proper in England, and its replacement by rime royal, that made inevitable a confusion which resulted in the Chaucerian stanza taking over the name of the form it supplanted. The second thing of which we may be certain is that James I of Scotland's use of that stanza had nothing whatever to do with its being named rime royal. As MacCracken points out, none of the early critics (not even James I of England) so much as hints at any connection between the name of the stanza and the royal poet, and concludes, "His poem was certainly unknown to those who wrote before his day (1424) and probably to those who wrote after, preserved as it was in a single MS."<sup>32</sup> The Chaucerian stanza may well be described as royal, but it is no more than just to Chaucer that it should bear his name.

<sup>28</sup> Puttenham, George, *The Arte of English Poesie*, (June?) 1589, edited by Edward Arber (London, 1869), pp. 75-76.

<sup>29</sup> Guest, Edwin, *A History of English Rhythms* (London, 1838), II, 359.

<sup>30</sup> *Loc. cit.*, *Modern Language Notes*, XXIV, 31.

<sup>31</sup> *The Ballade*, p. 265. <sup>32</sup> *Loc. cit.*, *Modern Language Notes*, XXIV, 32.

## CHAPTER VI

### CHAUCER'S INFLUENCE UPON HIS SUCCESSORS

SAINTSBURY is not a whit too emphatic when he says: "The influence of Chaucer upon English poetry of all dialects during the entire century which followed his death, and part, at least, of the next, is something to which there is hardly a parallel in literature."<sup>1</sup>

But as far as the ballade was concerned Chaucer had little influence upon his contemporaries. Of course Chaucer's extant ballades were few, and not among his most important poems, and he left no settled pattern for anybody to copy. If, as has been indicated in an earlier chapter, his general practice was to write three seven-line stanzas, with the same rhymes throughout and a refrain, and sometimes with, but sometimes without, an *envoi*, even in this matter he was not consistent. Since the *Balade of Complaynt* is entitled a ballade, though it is only a poem of three stanzas of rime royal, there need be little wonder if the minds of the men who came after him were confused. It was easy enough for them to consider any poem in rime royal a ballade; and as I have shown in the preceding chapter, that is precisely what they did.

All the same it is a little remarkable that they did not reserve the ballade pattern for occasional poems. For this had not only been Chaucer's practice, but the example of Gower's much more strictly patterned French *Cinkante Balades*.<sup>2</sup> While the ballade did not immediately disappear, it tended to become looser and looser, and to be dissolved into rime royal.

The case of Lydgate should be considered. As we have seen he used the term *ballade* as applying to what we now call rime royal, giving the weight of his authority (which was very great) to the error and confusion that were beginning. Yet he wrote ballades that conformed as a rule far more carefully than Chaucer's own to the Chaucerian model. That is to say he uses a seven-line stanza

<sup>1</sup> "The English Chaucerians," Chap. viii, *The Cambridge History of English Literature* (New York, 1908), II, 225.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Macaulay, George Campbell, *The Complete Works of John Gower* (Oxford, 1899), I, 335-378. Even when Gower used the seven-line stanza he makes his *envoi* of four lines.

rhymed *a, b, a, b, b, c, c*, but carries out the rubric scrupulously, though when he has an *envoi* it usually consists of seven lines. This fourth stanza, however, is never called an *envoi* by him.

One very important innovation was made by Lydgate: he used the ballade as an *envoi* to conclude long poems. This he did very generally in *The Fall of Princes*.<sup>3</sup> His exercises in this form are not very meritorious as poetry, but the pattern is strict. One sample must suffice. It will be noted that in this case the *envoi* idea is carried out even to the extent of his opening his ballade with the conventional address to the "Prince," though he concludes his ballade with what is in effect an *envoi* within an *envoi*, which again has the ceremonial salutation:

Pryncis, considreth, how in eueri age  
Folkis be dyuers off ther condicioun  
To plie & turne & chaunge in ther corage;  
Yit is ther non, to myn opynyoun,  
So dreedful chaung nor transmutacioun,  
As chaung off pryncis to yue a iugement,  
Or hasti credence, withoute auisement.

It is weel founde a passyng gret damage,  
Knowe and expert in eueri regioun,  
Thouh a tale haue a fair visage,  
It may include ful gret decepcioun:  
Hid vndir sugre, galle and fell poisoun,  
With a fresh face off double entendement—  
Yit yiueth no credence withoute auisement.

Let folkis alle be war off ther language,  
Keep ther tungen from oblocucioun,  
To hyndre or hurte bi no maner outrage,  
Preserue ther lippis from al detraccioun,  
From chaumpartie and contradiccioun;  
For list that fraude wer founde in ther entent,  
Ne yiueth no credence withoute auisement.

Pryncis, Pryncessis, off noble and hih parage,  
Which ha[ue] lordshipe and domynacioun,  
Voide hem a-side, that can flatre and fage;  
Fro tungen that haue a tarage off tresoun,  
Stoppith your eris from ther bittir soun;

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Bergen, Henry, *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1923+1927, Part I (Books I and II), p. 135.

Beth circumspect, nat hasti but prudent,  
And yiueth no credence withoute auisement.<sup>4</sup>

Lydgate does, however, use the ballade form for separate poems, and sometimes he uses a four-line *envoi*, as in the poem that concludes *The Flour of Courtesye*.<sup>5</sup> And it should also be said that he sometimes uses the traditional octave.<sup>6</sup>

John Quixley, translating eighteen of Gower's ballades (in 1402, according to MacCracken)<sup>7</sup> follows the French version very closely, usually keeping the sense line by line and using the French rhymes. Naturally therefore the ballades correspond, as do Gower's, to the standard French pattern. But the translation is dull and mechanical. King James I of Scotland in his *Good Counsel* is no better, but more closely follows the Chaucerian model.

Mention should be made also of the Middle English ballades once attributed to Charles of Orleans. They purport to be translations by the poet of his own work from French into English,<sup>8</sup> but are certainly not by him. MacCracken argues in favor of William de la Pole, first Duke of Suffolk (1396-1450).<sup>9</sup> These ballades follow the French pattern very closely, but range from a seven-line to an eleven-line stanza, and all have an *envoi*. But not all are translations from Charles of Orleans.

Other ballades strictly modelled upon the French pattern appeared during the fifteenth century. One of these is the "Balade coulourd and Reuersid" which, while not stated by MacCracken to be by the Duke of Suffolk, is said by him to be in Suffolk's manner.<sup>10</sup> It was transcribed from a sixteenth century manuscript<sup>11</sup> and Miss Cohen remarks that this shows that "although ballades had ceased to be written, their kind was still of a sufficient interest to

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I (Books I and II), p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> Skeat, W. W., *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, supplementary vol. to *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford, 1897), pp. 273-274.

<sup>6</sup> MacCracken, Henry Noble, *The Serpent of Division by John Lydgate* (Oxford, 1910), p. 66.

<sup>7</sup> "Quixley's Ballades Royal," *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, xx (1908), 33-50.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Taylor, George Watson, *Poems written in English by Charles Duke of Orleans*, Roxburghe Club, 1827. Cf. also an anonymous article in the *Retrospective Review*, Second Series, I (1827), 147-156.

<sup>9</sup> MacCracken, Henry Noble, "An English Friend of Charles of Orleans," *PMLA*, xxvi (1911), 142-180.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>11</sup> British Museum *MS. Arundel 26*, fol. 32 v.



be included in a miscellaneous volume belonging to that antiquary of Henry VIII's time, Sir William Dethek.<sup>12</sup>

Such ballades testify, of course, to the fact that English poets had read French ballades, for they conform closely to the rubric. But besides such things ballades were written which are exceedingly free, though, as we have seen, not more free than some of Chaucer's.

It should be noted, too, that Wyatt wrote a kind of a ballade, one that, since it had a refrain, was closer to the French form than some written by Chaucer and those who came after him.

The restful place, revyver of my smarte:  
The labors salve, inccessyng my sorow:  
The bodys ese, and trobler off my hart:  
Quieter of mynd, and my unquyet foo:  
Fforgetter of payn, remembryng my woo:  
The place of slepe, wherin I do but wake  
Be sprent with teres, my bed, I the forsake.

The frost, the snow, may not redresse my hete:  
Nor yet no heate abate my fervent cold:  
I know nothyng to ese my paynes mete:  
Eche care cawsythe increse by twenty fold:  
Revyvyng carys upon my sorows old,  
Suche overthwart affectes they do me make:  
Be sprent with terys my bed for to forsake.

Yet helpythe yt not: I find no better ese  
In bed or owt; thys moste cawsythe my payn:  
Where most I seke how beste that I may plesse,  
My lost labor, alas, ys all in vayn:  
Yet that I gave I cannot call agayn:  
No place fro me my greffe away can take  
Wherefore with terys my bed I the forsake.<sup>13</sup>

One still more loose in structure is cited by Miss Cohen:

BALADE VPON THE CHAUNSE OF THE DYSE  
First myn vnkunynge and my rudenesse  
Vnto yow alle that lysten knowe her chaunce  
By caste of dyse in your hertys impresse  
And by good wille to doon folles plesaunce  
All be I haue of wytte no suffisaunce  
This worldes course I haue herd sey ful ryve  
Ys that alle folle shal not at ones thryve.

<sup>12</sup> *The Ballade*, p. 286.

<sup>13</sup> Foxwell, Agnes Kate, *The Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (London, 1914), pp. 35-36.

I pray to god that euery wight may caste  
 Vpon three dyse ryght as is in hys herte  
 Whether he be rechlesse or stedfaste  
 So moote he laughen outhur elles smerte  
 He that is gilty his lyfe to conuerte  
 They that in trouthe haue suffred many a throwe  
 Moote ther chaunce fal as they moote be knowe.

Syth fortune of alle thynges gouernaunce  
 How euer ys hadde excused holdeth me  
 ffor neyther am I worthy to bere penaunce  
 Ne thanke truly in no maner degre  
 But natheles this wol I say for me  
 She that yow beste may helpen in this nede  
 Ryght wel to caste I pre fortune yow spede.  
 Explicit Balade vpon the chaunce of the dyse.<sup>14</sup>

Even including among the ballades pieces like the one just cited, there are to be found among Middle English ballades only about a hundred and twenty items. And this is a very meagre harvest when we compare it with the several thousands that were produced during the same period in France. Miss Cohen has gone into the matter with remarkable thoroughness, and has examined White's statement<sup>15</sup> that Shirley's manuscript in the Ashmolean Museum is full of ballades, and also Padelford's statement in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* that "*MS. Rawlinson C 813* contains a large number of the ballades."<sup>16</sup> The fact is that there are no ballades in either manuscript.<sup>17</sup> And it is extremely unlikely that the further searching of the manuscripts will yield more than a few isolated examples.

Chaucer, by inventing rime royal, gave his successors a new form, which they were quick to use, however clumsy the use often was. The trend in English verse at the time was all in the direction of enormous shapeless poems. And rime royal became the accepted medium for them.

It is strange that heroic couplets were neglected. But perhaps it was a piece of luck, for when they were rediscovered, they came

<sup>14</sup> Bodleian *MS Fairfax 16*, fol. 148<sup>r</sup>: quoted from H. L. Cohen's *The Ballade*, p. 285.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. White, Gleeson, *Ballades and Rondeaux* (London, 1887), p. xxiv. All the Ashmolean MSS. are now in the Bodleian.

<sup>16</sup> Padelford, Frederick Morgan, "Transition English Song Collections," Chapter xvi, of *The Cambridge History of English Literature* (New York, 1908), II, 443.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Cohen, H. L., *The Ballade*, pp. 291-292.

as something new, unstaled by familiarity, unspoiled by incompetent use. Puttenham evidently has scanty regard for the form: "His other verses of the Canterbury tales be but riding ryme, neuerthelesse very well becomming the matter of that pleasaunt pilgrimage."<sup>18</sup> No doubt he thought it unpolished, for the reason that he did not know how to read it, and so dismissed it as riding rime—jog trot!

But Dunbar employed it in *The Freiris of Berwick*, a poem which, not in its matter but its manner, derived from *The Canterbury Tales*; but even he is not quite happily at home in it. In the anonymous *Libel of English Policy*, written about a generation after the death of Chaucer, it is found, written somewhat crudely, though by no means without vigor. Part of *The Temple of Glass* is in heroic couplets, and part in rime royal. Skelton uses the heroic couplet, but seldom, and with indifference to the smoothness of his verses. And Barclay (1475-1552) in his *Eclogues* (based upon Baptista Mantuanus, who in turn imitated Virgil) has the heroic couplet. But full mastery is still lacking.

Some for the charet, some for the cart or plough,  
And some for hakneyes, if they be light and tough.  
Eche field agreeth not well for euery seede,  
Who hath moste labour is worthy of best mede.<sup>19</sup>

Mastery of course is not very apparent in much of the rime royal that was written during the fifteenth century, and which was clearly preferred to the heroic couplet, either because it was regarded as more dignified, or because it suited the taste of the time, or because it was less difficult—for unless the heroic couplet is polished it is intolerable.

Rime royal was the prop needed by Lydgate (1370-1440) and Occleve (1365?-1450?) and Hawes (died *circa* 1530); and without such a prop they would have written much worse than they did—if they had written at all. Saintsbury sums them up in his usual forthright style:

Here is Lydgate—a man of vast industry, endowed with nearly all the older culture of his time, a man of wits and wit, educated at

<sup>18</sup> Puttenham, George, *The Arte of English Poesie*, (June?) 1589, edited by Edward Arber (London, 1869), p. 76.

<sup>19</sup> *Fourth Eclogue*, 199-203, cited from Eleanor Prescott Hammond's *English Verse between Chaucer and Surrey* (Durham, N. C., 1927), p. 319.

the most famous universities abroad as well as at home, nay, a man who has some faint flashes of actual poetry now and then—and he cannot be trusted to write three decent lines running, and people have to invent a morbid growth of verse in order to get some method into his muddle. Here is Occleve—rather a poor creature, but certainly not the inferior of scores and hundreds of very decent versifiers at other times—who is, on the whole, little better than Lydgate. Here is Hawes, who actually would be a poet if he could get the great ox off his tongue, and who cannot get it to budge more than an inch or so for his life. Here is Skelton, in many ways as bright a wit as Europe could show, a born man of letters, who is given up, if not quite exclusively, to bombast and doggerel by turns.<sup>20</sup>

And Licklider describes the poets of the century that followed Chaucer:

They exaggerated his mannerisms, perpetuated and increased the frequency of his archaisms, added largely to the number of his prosodical liberties, using them with little skill, and supplemented the dignified flow of his decasyllable by the empty pomp of aureate diction. . . . But there was method in this madness; a definite ideal was always in sight; everything is done in order, if not decently and according to modern taste; and it is the purest superficiality to dismiss this school as a failure to attain a standard and as a period of complete metrical chaos. The standard was there, false or not, and the period is not one of anarchy and confusion but of the strictest convention. There is nothing new, and the old is worn threadbare.<sup>21</sup>

Each of these summaries is severe, and though perhaps too severe, not unjust. It was not their fault if the way English was being spoken was so different from that of Chaucer's time as to make him metrically increasingly unintelligible. They lacked inventiveness and a high order of genius, and so clung to what they knew to be good, in a blind but sound instinct, hoping, we must believe, that in the end everything would work itself out, as it did.

The trouble was not with Chaucer, or their undiscerning admiration of him. Nor was it their fault if they were unable fully to appreciate him. For all their laudatory expressions, they set beside him as equals Gower and Lydgate. Even the brilliantly gifted Dunbar could write:

<sup>20</sup> *A History of English Prosody*, I, 290-291.

<sup>21</sup> Licklider, Albert Harp, *Chapters on the Metric of the Chaucerian Tradition* (Baltimore, 1910), p. 12.

The noble Chaucer, of makaris flour,  
The Monk of Bery, and Gower, all thie <sup>22</sup>

They did what they could with the instrument at their disposal, and if they had not possessed rime royal one wonders what they would have done. It could have been only to use some inferior form with the same slavishness and lack of incentive. Or there might have been nothing at all.

Some, standing aghast at Lydgate's 140,000 lines, might cynically say that there would have been no great loss to letters. But this would be decidedly unfair. These men were doing better than they knew: they were preparing for the harvest which they could not gather. What Chaucer had sown, Spenser was to reap. The men of the fifteenth century kept alive the best tradition of English verse: at least that.

Yet we must remember that though poetry in England during this period was generally awkward even when mechanical, better things were happening in Scotland (to which I shall come in a moment) and even in England. There is, for example, the really exquisite work by the anonymous poet who wrote *The Flower and the Leaf* and *The Assembly of Ladies*.<sup>23</sup> There have been people who have preferred these delightful things to anything in Chaucer; and while it is impossible to admit that they are correct, it is easy to understand their point of view.

But good or bad, nearly all the poetry written was in rime royal. That tradition lasted well into the new era. Though Surrey and Wyatt, inspired by the Renaissance and their ears ringing with Italian music, introduced blank verse into England (and the sonnet pattern from which Chaucer had turned away a hundred and fifty years earlier), they, too, largely wrote in the older form. Even Spenser did so in his *Four Hymns*; and Shakespeare in *The Rape of Lucrece* and Milton in his poem *On the Death of a Fair Infant* (this last with a concluding alexandrine) continued to use rime royal. Though English versification had triumphantly recovered itself, and though many new forms were appearing, Chaucer's influence had not ceased. In fact, as I shall try to show in the next

<sup>22</sup> *Lament for the Makaris*, Mackenzie, W. MacKay, *The Poems of William Dunbar* (Edinburgh, 1932), p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Skeat, W. W., *op. cit.*, pp. 361-404.

chapter, its crowning glory and completion was won with the invention of the Spenserian stanza.

But first let us note two other matters which should be considered. One is the work of the Scottish Chaucerians; the other is the work of Skelton.

The poets who wrote north of the Border during the fifteenth century—Dunbar, King James I, Gavin Douglas and Henryson—were upon the whole decidedly superior as technicians to the English poets who succeeded Chaucer. Surely the reason that Saintsbury gives—"Just as the thoroughly well-trained English schoolboy writes Latin verse with greater 'correctness' than even Ovid himself, and with much greater correctness than other Latins, so do these Scottish poets write the metres of 'their Inglis' with much greater precision than their fellow-pupils in the South do"<sup>24</sup>—tells but half the story. For the Scottish Chaucerians show not only greater metrical correctness, but also use a wider range of forms. They, too, make ample use of rime royal; but they are not strictly confined to it. They possess a higher degree of inventiveness, they are better poets. But it is no doubt true that because literary English was not theirs by birthright they gave a closer attention to it, and consequently understood Chaucer better, who was less archaic in their ears than in those of Englishmen whose spoken and written language had greatly changed since Chaucer's time.

For the English poets endless trouble arose because of Chaucer's final *e*, which confused them. Imitating Chaucer as they did, without thoroughly understanding his versification, they did not gain sufficient artistic power for further development. Had Lydgate and Occleve possessed a higher degree of genius they would undoubtedly have branched out in new directions. As it was, rime royal, which should have proved their liberation, or rather have been an indication of the path along which they might progress, fettered them. They understood *ababbcc*; but they did not know how to master their verse, nor did they ever penetrate, for that reason, the secret of the stateliness and sweetness of the medium they were using. They preserved rime royal, which is to their credit, but we can find little indication in their work that they so much as suspected that it could be developed further.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *History of English Prosody*, I, 266

<sup>25</sup> If the *London Lickpenny* is in four-foot rime royal, which was used later by

But among the Scots charming variations occurred. One of these is the use of the ballade octave with a refrain, as it appears, for example, in Dunbar's *Of The Nativity of Christ*. But by a sound instinct the line is shortened and made lighter.

*Rorate celi desuper!*  
 Hevins distill your balmy schouris,  
 For now is rissin the bricht day ster  
 Fro the ros Mary, flour of flouris:  
 The cleir Sone, quhome no clud devouuis,  
 Surminting Phebus in the est,  
 Is cumin in his hevinly touris;  
*Et nobis Puer natus est.*<sup>26</sup>

The same poet, who shortened the line of the ballade octave so adroitly, uses the heroic octave in his superb poem on London, and rime royal in *The Thrissil and the Rois*. But the range of the pattern employed by Chaucer in *Womanly Noblesse* is extended by Dunbar in *The Goldyn Targe*:

O reverend Chaucere, rose of rethoris all,  
 As in oure tong ane flour imperiall,  
 That raise in Britane evir, quho redis rycht,  
 Thou beris of makaris the tryumph riall;  
 Thy fresch anamalit termes celicall  
 This mater coud illumynit have full brycht:  
 Was thou noucht of our Inglisch all the lycht,  
 Surmounting eviry tong terrestriall,  
 Alls fer as Mayis morow dois mydynycht?<sup>27</sup>

The same pattern is found in John Ballentyne.<sup>28</sup> And a similar one—that of Chaucer's *Compleynt of Mars*—in Douglas's *The Palice of Honour* and in Sir David Lindsay. But all these wrote in rime royal and the octave as well.

The blyssfull byrdis bownis to the treis,  
 And ceissis of thare heuinlye armoneis.  
 The Cornecraik in the croft, I heir hir cry.

---

Wyatt, this variation is not to be accounted as being in the direction of the true development of the pattern.

<sup>26</sup> Mackenzie, W. MacKay, *The Poems of William Dunbar*, p. 154. The same pattern is used in the English *Quia amore langueo*, however, and elsewhere.

<sup>27</sup> Mackenzie, W. MacKay, *The Poems of William Dunbar*, p. 119.

<sup>28</sup> *The Bannatyne Manuscript*, Hunterian Club, 1873, II, 9. See also George Bannatyne's introductory poem.

The bak, the Howlat, febyll of thare eis,  
 For thare pastyme, now in the ewinnyng fleis.  
 The Nychtyngaill, with myrthfull melody,  
 His naturall notis persith throw the sky,  
 Tyll Synthea, makand her obseruance,  
 Quhilk on the nycht dois tak hir dalyance.<sup>29</sup>

And Alexander Scott (1525?-1584?) uses the following stanza:

Vp, helsum hairt! thy rutis rais, and lowp;  
 Exalt and clym *within* my breist in staige,  
 Art thou *nocht* wantoun, haill, & in gud howp,  
 Fermit in grace, and free of all thirlaige,  
 Bathing in bliss, and sett in hie curaige?  
 Braisit in joy, no falt may the affray,  
 Having thy ladeis hart as heretaige,  
 In blenche-ferme ffor ane sallat every May:  
 So neid*is* thow *nocht* now sussy, sytt, nor sorrow,  
 Sen thow art sure of sollace evin & morrow.<sup>30</sup>

It is in such things (and more of them will be instanced in the next chapter) that we see rime royal reaching out to the rich elaboration of the Spenserian stanza.

The case of Skelton is apparently quite different. In him is to be observed an effort—which may be described as desperate rather than determined—to escape from the rigid domination of rime royal, though that, of course, is only part of the story.

On one side he was merely a Chaucerian imitator, and this is not his strongest side. On the other he shows that he, more than any other man of his time, and more perhaps than anybody until Sackville (whose method was very different), was feeling out towards the Spenserian development. This may be seen in the intricately embroidered stanza pattern—one of twelve heroic lines—of his poem *On the Death of the Noble Prince, King Edward the Fourth*.

And then there are his macaronics, which, though they often degenerate into vile doggerel,<sup>31</sup> could achieve a thing so exquisitely charming as his lines to *Mistress Isabel Pennell*:

<sup>29</sup> Hamer, Douglas, *The Works of Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, 1490-1555* (Scottish Text Society, 1931), I, 385.

<sup>30</sup> Donald, A. K., *The Poems of Alexander Scott*, Early English Text Society, 1902, (Extra Series 85), 28.

<sup>31</sup> But even at his worst, it must be said that Skelton always shows that he knows what he is about, that his doggerel is a defiance of constraint.



By saynt Mary, my lady,  
 Youn mammy and your dady  
 Brought forth a godely babi!

My mayden Isabell,  
 Reflaring rosabell,  
 The flagrant camamell,  
 The ruddy 1osary,  
 The souerayne rosemary,  
 The praty strawbery;  
 The columbyne, the nepte,  
 The 1eloffer well set,  
 The propre vyolet—<sup>32</sup>

and so on There is the breadth of a new spring in that.

Lee would account for Skelton on the ground of French influence.<sup>33</sup>

Skelton's chief debt to French influence only becomes visible when we compare with French verse the English poet's characteristic metre of short lines which vary in number of syllables from four to six, and rhyme usually in couplets, but at times four, five, or six times over. . . . No English poet of any earlier epoch had ventured systematically on lines of fewer syllables than eight; alternations of lines of seven syllables were occasional but rare . . . It is not difficult to show that the 'pith' of Skeltonian verse—its short, jolting gallop—is of recent French breeding, or to show that its most telling features, which have no English precedents of earlier dates, are matched in popular French verse of Skelton's own generation.<sup>34</sup>

No doubt contemporary French poetry did influence Skelton but it was by no means the only thing to have affected his versification. As Berdan points out, Skelton, so far from being a wild, fantastic figure, actually wrote in the manner of a past age.<sup>35</sup>

The form he used was not peculiar to himself "Skeltonic" verse was not his invention. Such an adaptation of the medieval Latin was normal with the pre-humanistic Churchmen.<sup>36</sup> Even Hawes, from whom one would hardly expect such things, occasionally broke out, as in the complicated versification of the

<sup>32</sup> Dyce, Alexander, *The Poetical Works of John Skelton* (London, 1843), I, 401

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Lee, Sidney, *The French Renaissance in England* (Oxford, 1910), pp. 102-106.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Berdan, John Milton, *Early Tudor Poetry* (New York, 1920), p. 219

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

*Conuercyon*, and showed that he had read somewhat in the more extravagant of the Goliards. Surely so artificial a piece as that which follows must have been a forlorn attempt to escape from the conventions of the time.

See  
 Ye (kynde  
 Be  
     Agayne  
 My payne (in mynde  
 Releyne  
     My swete bloode  
 On the loode (my broder  
 Dyde the good  
     My face ryght red  
 My armes spred (thynke none oder  
 My woundes bled  
     Behold thou my syde  
 Wounded so ryght wyde (all for thyn owne sake  
 Bledynge sore that tyde  
 Thus for the I smeited  
 Why arte thou harde herted (I thy swerynge aslake  
 Be by me conuerted  
     Tere me nowe no more  
 My woundes are sore (and come to my grace  
 Leue swerynge therefore  
     I am redy  
 To grant mercy (for thy trespass  
 To the truely  
     Come nowe nere  
 My frende dere (before me  
 And appere  
     I so  
 In wo se se  
 Dyde go  
     I  
 Crye (the  
     Hy.<sup>37</sup>

It is Skelton, however, who exhibits most clearly the union of these seemingly opposed influences: medieval Latin, traditional English versification, and the short staccato French line.

Despite his impish rebelliousness, despite his fantastic innova-

<sup>37</sup> Hawes, Stephen, *The Conversyon of Swerers* (Edinburgh, 1854), pp. 5-6.

tions, which were often nothing but scholastic archaisms, he too, was largely dominated by the Chaucerian tradition.

O noble Chaucer, whos pullisshyd eloquence  
 Oure Englysshe rude so fresshely hath set out,  
 That bounde ar we with all deu reuerence,  
 With all our strength that we can brynge about,  
 To owe to yow our seruyce, and more if we mowte!  
 But what sholde I say? ye wote what I entende,  
 Whiche glad am to please, and loth to offende.<sup>38</sup>

Skelton employed rime royal—along with a number of other forms, as was his wont—even in his play *Magnificence*.<sup>39</sup> Sometimes it is used in long speeches, where it is tolerable; but it is used often in the give and take of rapid conversation, where, being broken up, it is inept. One stanza may be taken by way of example. In it Liberty, Felicity, Magnificence and Fancy all have their say.

*Lyb.* Whether sholde welth be rulyd by lyberte,  
 Or lyberte by welth? let se, tell me that.  
*Fel.* Syr, as me semeth, ye sholde be rulyd by me.  
*Magn.* What nede you with hym thus prate and chat?  
*Fan.* Shewe vs your mynde then, howe to do and what.  
*Magn.* I say, that I wyll ye haue hym in gydyng.  
*Lyb.* Mayster Felycyte, let be your chydyng.<sup>40</sup>

That is misuse of rime royal. Yet the spirit of experiment was nevertheless here a fumbling towards new forms based upon the old.

Such forms had always been inherent in rime royal. The pattern of Chaucer's verse was not a lifeless crystal, but a seed, instinct with growth. For a long winter that seed had been sleeping in the soil of English poetry. Dimly and gropingly poets from Dunbar to Skelton had been reaching out towards a fresh development. And then, in due time, Spenser came.

<sup>38</sup> Dyce, A., *The Poetical Works of John Skelton*, I, 378-379.

<sup>39</sup> But an analogous case is that of Shakespeare who used the sonnet form for some of the dialogue of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

<sup>40</sup> Dyce, A., *The Poetical Works of John Skelton*, I, 272. The typographical arrangement employed by Philip Henderson in his somewhat modernized *The Complete Poems of John Skelton* (London, 1931), p. 220, draws out more clearly the fact that much of this play is in rime royal.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FORMATION OF THE SPENSERIAN STANZA

IT IS commonly said that the Spenserian stanza is merely that of the *Monk's Tale*, to which an alexandrine has been added as the concluding line. Tyrwhitt seems to have been the first to have made this claim.<sup>1</sup> And the majority of those writing on the same subject have said precisely the same thing. Perhaps it is put most fully and clearly by Guest:

The noble stanza which we owe to Spenser, is formed by adding an alexandrine to the ballet-stave of eight—such alexandrine rhiming with the last verse of the ballet-stave. By this *banding* of the rhyme, Spenser's stanza has all that connexion of parts which science demands, and which is so seldom to be met with in our later combinations. The sweeping length of the alexandrine furnishes also an imposing compass of sound, that to many ears is singularly delightful, and must, I think, convey to everyone an impression of grandeur and of dignity.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore Guest pronounces the Spenserian stanza to be "the most beautiful, as well as the most perfect of English combinations."

To this Schipper adds: "It is not, as is sometimes said, derived from the Italian *ottava rima* . . . but, as was pointed out by Guest . . . from a Middle English eight-lined popular stanza of five-foot verses with rhymes on the formula *a, b, a, b, b, c, b, c*, which was modelled in its turn on a well-known Old French ballade-stanza."<sup>3</sup>

It would be as wearisome, as it is unnecessary, to list all the authorities who subscribe to this view. But to cite recent works, it is restated by Root,<sup>4</sup> and by Legouis.<sup>5</sup> The eminent French scholar

<sup>1</sup> Tyrwhitt, Thomas, *The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer* (Edinburgh, 1868), note 63 on p. xl. (This work first appeared in 1775-78.) An anonymous writer in *Blackwood's Magazine* for 1806 (No. xcix) in a note on p. 200 draws attention to the apparent similarity between the two stanzas.

<sup>2</sup> Guest, Edwin, *A History of English Rhythms* (London, 1838), II, 389. Skeat also holds to the Monk's Tale stanza as being the prototype of the Spenserian stanza. The alexandrine line, he adds, could have been found in *Tottel's Miscellany*. "The Origin of the Spenserian Stanza," *Athenaeum*, May 6, 1893, p. 574.

<sup>3</sup> Schipper, Jakob, *History of English Versification* (Oxford, 1910), p. 358.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Root, Robert Kilburn, *The Poetry of Chaucer* (Boston and New York, 1906), p. 35.

adds in a footnote on the same page: "The formula of the line is  $a, b, a, b, b, c, b, c, c$ . It is a true stanza, a perfect stanza of which the lines are so interlaced that it cannot be broken."

I have quoted the *ipsissima verba* of Guest, Schipper and Legouis because, as will be seen in a moment, I believe that the reasons they give in support of their theory are rather reasons against it.

First let it be admitted—for this is incontestable—that as a *description* of the Spenserian stanza the statements quoted are perfectly adequate. But it is another question as to whether the development of the Spenserian stanza can be satisfactorily accounted for in this way. For this is to treat poetry as something synthetic, and therefore is an entire misunderstanding of its nature. If verse could be put together like this, poetry would be merely what many people think it is: an arbitrary geometric pattern which depends solely upon the ingenuity or caprice of the versifier, but which could never have any life, since it springs from nothing that is alive. I hope to show that the Spenserian stanza probably sprang from something quite different.

The view held here is that on the day when Chaucer first set free his seven-line stanza from the restrictions of the ballade (that is when he began to use rime royal) the Spenserian stanza was already implicit in it. Even without what Chaucer did, Spenser might conceivably have hit upon his own pattern. But we need not concern ourselves with such a supposition, because Spenser was in the line of succession from Chaucer. Therefore we must believe that Spenser took his hint from Chaucer, or from some other predecessor. I shall try to show that his stanza was based on Chaucer's, and that it represented the culmination of what the poets between Chaucer and himself had been groping towards for more than a century. The famous strophe reminds one of Milton's description of the creation of the beasts:

Now half appeer'd  
The Tawny Lion, pawing to get free  
His hinder parts, then springs as broke from Bonds,  
And Rampant shakes his Brinded main.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Legouis, E. and Cazamian, L., *History of English Literature* (one volume edition, New York, 1930), p. 296.

<sup>6</sup> Patterson, Frank Allen, *Milton's Complete Poems*, (New York, 1930). *Paradise Lost*, VII. 462-465.

First let us look at the theory of those who hold that the Spenserian stanza is nothing other than the Chaucerian octave with an alexandrine tied on to its tail.

Schippei, in advancing this theory, says that Chaucer's octave was modelled on the stanza of the ballade, and affirms that rime royal is a modification of that stanza.<sup>7</sup> The ballade octave *a, b, a, b, b, c, b, c* is indeed used by Spenser, but only once, which is in *The Shepherdes Calender*.<sup>8</sup>

This meagre use of the octave would appear to indicate that it did not greatly attract Spenser. Rime royal was used by him more extensively, and is the pattern of his *Ruines of Time* and *Fowre Hymns*. This had been the dominant measure during four generations, and though Spenser transcended it, not even he could quite escape its influence. And that transcendence was possible only because it included transformation. He needed for the full exercise of his genius a pattern other than rime royal, but the pattern he found so perfectly suited to his special needs was closely related to rime royal.

Let us take as a somewhat similar case the magnificent stanza which Keats invented for his odes. The norm of it is to be found in the *Grecian Urn* and is rhymed *a, b, a, b, c, d, e, c, d, e*. The fact that there are minor variations from the strict pattern—that the *Nightingale* shortens the eighth line, or that the *Autumn* is rhymed *a, b, a, b, c, d, e, c, d, d, e*—only serves to render the standard form<sup>9</sup> more definite. Now where did Keats get the idea of this stanza? Possibly he did not know. But we may be sure that he derived it from the sonnet. The first four lines of his ode stanza are half of a Shakespearian octet, the last six an Italian sestet. All this has been very clearly demonstrated by Garrod, though no doubt it was seen by many people before the publication of his book.<sup>10</sup>

Keats, after successfully writing both Shakespearian and Italian sonnets, suddenly wearied of them—or rather (shall we not say feeling the movement of his odes already stirring in him?) tried to do something new with the sonnet form. Accordingly he wrote his fine though curious sonnet *If by dull rhymes our English must be chained*, which is rhymed *a, b, c, a, b, d, c, a, b, c, d, e, d, e*.<sup>10</sup> This,

<sup>7</sup> *Op cit.*, pp. 328–358.

<sup>8</sup> The whole of *June* and a few lines of *April*.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Garrod, Heathcote William, *Keats* (Oxford, 1926), pp. 84–94.

<sup>10</sup> One day somebody is going to try to prove that when Keats wrote that sonnet he had *terza rima* in mind.

along with two other sonnets, is contained in a long letter begun in February and ended in April 1819, and addressed to George and Georgiana Keats. On May 3, he adds a postscript: "I have been endeavouring to discover a better Sonnet Stanza than we have. The legitimate does not suit the language over-well from the pouncing rhymes—the other kind appears too elegiac—and the couplet at the end of it has seldom a pleasing effect—I do not pretend to have succeeded."<sup>11</sup>

He had not succeeded in producing a satisfactory new sonnet form. But he had stumbled by accident upon the stanza for his odes, which he began to write in the following May. No great poetic form is ever concocted. It is always a discovery, which, once it has been made, seems natural and inevitable. And what is discovered is a thing that has grown out of still another thing.

The question here is, out of what has the Spenserian stanza grown? Out of the ballade-octave? Or out of *terza rima*? Or out of *ottava rima*? Or out of rime royal?

Two other questions should be asked. Where did Spenser get the idea of the concluding alexandrine? And what is the characteristic merit of the Spenserian Stanza?

To deal with these last first will clear the way for a discussion of the origin of Spenser's famous strophe.

The alexandrine happened to be a fad of the sixteenth century. The English poets were impressed by the fact that the *Pléiade* had revived the ancient alexandrine in France and had given it "a new cadence and pliancy"<sup>12</sup> But in English the alexandrine—except for special effects, and for the conclusion of the Spenserian stanza—is always a somewhat artificial thing, though for French poetry it is the normal heroic line. The English poets took it up under French influence. Drayton used it in his *Polyolbion*, Sidney in some of the sonnets of *Astrophel and Stella* and elsewhere, and Shakespeare in some of the sonnets curiously embedded in the dialogue of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Spenser had used it to open the stanza he contrived for November of *The Shepheardes Calender*.

Whence is it, that the flouret of the field doth fade,  
And lyeth buried long in Winters bale:  
Yet, soone as spring his mantle doth displaye,

<sup>11</sup> Forman, Maurice Buxton, *The Letters of John Keats* (Oxford, 1931), II, 369–370.

<sup>12</sup> Lee, Sidney, *The French Renaissance in England* (Oxford, 1910), p. 203.

It floureth fresh, as it should neuer fayle?  
 But thing on earth that is of most auaile,  
     As vertues braunch and beauties budde,  
     Reliuen not for any good.  
     O heauie herse,  
 The braunch once dead, the budde eke needes must quaille,  
     O carefull verse!<sup>13</sup>

In this instance we feel that, though it is not obviously demanded by the structure of the stanza, it is pleasing as a variant. The same cannot be said of English poems written throughout in alexandrines, not even the most notable and most recent of these poems, Robert Bridges's *Testament of Beauty*. What could Spenser have thought of even the best poems in alexandrines produced in England in his time—such of Sidney's sonnets as were in this measure—except that they were made tolerable only by the poet's extreme skill? The worst are damnatory of the form itself:

Yet worse than worst, I say thou art a theefe—A theefe!  
 Now God forbid! a theefe! and of worst theeuues the cheefe:  
 Theeuues steal for need, and steale but goods which paine recouers,  
 But thou, rich in all ioyes, dost rob my ioyes from me,  
 Which cannot be restor'd by time or industrie:  
 Of foes the spoile is euill, far worse of constant louers.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, the delicate literary tact of Spenser perceived that there was a fitting place for the alexandrine, a place for the line which elsewhere was a bit of artificiality and affectation: and this was at the close of the stanza of *The Faerie Queene*.

The function of the alexandrine here has never been better described than by Saintsbury:

Despite its great bulk and the consequent facilities which it offers for the vignetting of definite pictures and incidents within a single stanza, the long Alexandrine at the close seems to launch it towards its successor *ripae ulterioris amore*, or rather with the desire of fresh striking out in the unbroken though wave-swept sea of poetry.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> De Sélincourt, Ernest, *Spenser's Minor Poems* (Oxford, 1910). November, 82-92.

<sup>14</sup> Grosart, Alexander B., *The Complete Poems of Sir Philip Sidney* (London, 1873), I, 84.

<sup>15</sup> *History of English Prosody*, I, 366-367.



Nearly everybody who has written verse in Spenser's pattern has perceived that the alexandrine at the close was not merely something permitted, but something demanded.<sup>16</sup> The line is absolutely needed as ballast. Once added to the form which had been slowly developing for more than a century, it was universally perceived that the alexandrine was organic with the whole stanza.

It is, indeed, the crowning glory of the stanza which Guest, in a passage already quoted, pronounced "the most beautiful as well as the most perfect of English combinations." Seventeenth and eighteenth century critics, however, were reluctant to admit anything like as much. Thomas Warton, writing in 1754, a little before the Romantic Movement discovered and exploited the Spenserian stanza, says severely:

Spenser in chusing this stanza, did not sufficiently consider the genius of the English language, which does not easily fall into a frequent repetition of the same termination.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover he says that the stanza obliged Spenser "to dilate the thing to be expressed, however unimportant, with trifling and tedious circumlocutions. . . . It necessitated him, when matter failed towards the close of a stanza, to run into a ridiculous redundancy and repetition of words . . . and it forced him, that he might make out his complement of rhymes, to introduce a puerile or impertinent idea."<sup>18</sup>

The criticism, though acute, was too much bound by the prejudices of Warton's time. His argument would apply with much the same force against the sonnet. And Warton's own sonnets show how imperfectly he had grasped the possibilities of that form. What he says of Spenser is sometimes true; but the Spenserian stanza should be judged by the best specimens of it. And it might be added that of all the chief patterns of English poetry less poor work has been done in this pattern than in any other.

We should by now be in a position to deal with the argument in

<sup>16</sup> A few exceptions have been noted by Morton, E. P. "The Spenserian Stanza before 1700," *Modern Philology*, IV (1907), 644.

<sup>17</sup> Warton, Thomas, *Observations on the Fairy Queen of Spenser* (London, 1807), I, 157. And Warton, in this matter, was doing little more than echo Johnson's strictures (cf. *The Rambler*, Tuesday, May 14, 1751, *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, LL.D. [Oxford, 1823], III, 79).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 158-159.

favor of *ottava rima*. If it be true, as Guest says (and it is), that "Spenser's stanza has all that connection of parts which science demands, and which is so seldom to be met with in our later combinations",<sup>19</sup> and if it is "a true stanza, of which the lines are so interlaced that it cannot be broken",<sup>20</sup> the idea of its having been derived from the not very effective Monk's Tale stanza, to which has been added a concluding alexandrine, is false. To the argument in favor of the octave Miss Pope opposes two objections, which she says may appear intangible to some (though to me they seem conclusive): "[These] are the inherent unity of Spenser's verse, and the utter dissimilarity in poetic quality between it and the Chaucerian quatrain. There is a quality in Spenser's verse which proclaims it as a unit, and not a structure of two divisions with a lean-to at the end. One and indivisible are the nine lines of his verse."<sup>21</sup>

Miss Pope's theory is that the Spenserian stanza originates from *terza rima*, and to that I must come in a moment. She argues only against the claim of the Chaucerian octave, but says nothing against the claims of rime royal or *ottava rima*, though she notes that their claims have been advanced.<sup>22</sup>

Since the argument here is in favor of rime royal, it is necessary that the possible connection between *ottava rima* and the Spenserian stanza be first disposed of.

This theory was suggested by John Hughes early in the eighteenth century,<sup>23</sup> and more definitely affirmed by Warton, who adds, "It seems probable that Spenser was principally induced to adopt it, with the addition of one line, from the practice of Ariosto and Tasso."<sup>24</sup> Then Hazlitt (who had evidently been reading Warton) said in his lecture on Chaucer and Spenser: "This stanza, with alternate and repeatedly recurring rhymes, is borrowed from

<sup>19</sup> Guest, E., *op cit*, II, 389

<sup>20</sup> Legouis, E., and Cazamian, L., *op. cit.*, p. 296.

<sup>21</sup> Pope, Emma F., "The Critical Background of the Spenserian Stanza, *Modern Philology*, xxiv (1926), 37. Cf. Taboureux, Etienne, "The Spenserian Stanza," *Revue de l'Enseignement des Langues Vivantes*, xv (1899), 499-500, xvi (1900), 164.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35

<sup>23</sup> Hughes, John, *Introduction to Works of Spenser*, London, 1715, (reprinted in *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser*, Bell's edition [London, 1787], I, lxxx). And, before Hughes, Edward Phillips, Milton's nephew, in the Preface (pages unnumbered) to his *Theatrum Poetarum Anglicanorum* (1675), advanced it.

<sup>24</sup> *Observations on the Fairy Queen of Spenser* p. 157.

the Italians. It was peculiarly fitted to their language, which abounds in similar vowel terminations, and is as little adapted to ours, from the stubborn, unaccommodating resistance which the consonant endings of the northern languages make to this sort of endless sing-song."<sup>25</sup> The theory that was so illustriously launched, has been advanced even in the article on the Spenserian stanza in the latest edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, though not in such a way as to prejudice other views.<sup>26</sup>

On the face of it the claim is plausible. Spenser had been influenced by Tasso, who wrote his *Gerusalemme Liberata* in ottava rima, and by Ariosto, who wrote his *Orlando Furioso* in the same pattern. It is not impossible that Spenser took the first four and the last two lines of ottava rima and added a line to the middle of that stanza in order to get his own form. But even as a description of the Spenserian stanza it is less close than that which offers the ballade octave plus a concluding alexandrine. For where ottava rima is arranged *a, b, a, b, a, b, c, c*, the Spenserian stanza is arranged *a, b, a, b, b, c, b, c, c*. And if the movement of the ballade octave strikingly differs from that of the Spenserian stanza, the movement of the ottava rima differs still more. Compare two samples:

Che dolce più, che più giocondo stato  
Saria di quel d' un amoroso core?  
Che viver più felice e più beato,  
Che ritrovarsi in servitù d' amore?  
Se non fosse l' uom sempre stimolato  
Da quel sospetto rio, da quel timore,  
Da quel martir, da quella frenesia,  
Da quella rabbia, detta gelosia.<sup>27</sup>

Nought is there vnder heau'ns wide hollownesse,  
That moues more deare compassion of mind,  
Than beautie brought t'vnworthie wretchednesse  
Through enuies snares, or fortunes freakes vnkind.  
I, whether lately through her brightnesse blynd,

<sup>25</sup> *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, edited by Percival Presland Howe (London and Toronto, 1930), V, 43-44.

<sup>26</sup> "It is strange how persistent is the notion that the poet, by a laborious and most artificial transposition in the lines of the ottava rima, remolded it to his own purpose." Cory, Herbert Ellsworth, *Edmund Spenser: a Critical Study* (Berkeley, California, 1917), p. 73.

<sup>27</sup> Bolza, Giovanni Battista, *Orlando Furioso di Ludovico Ariosto* (Vienna, 1853) Canto xxx, st. 1.

Or through alleageance and fast fealtie,  
Which I do owe vnto all woman kind,  
Feele my hart perst with so great agonie,  
When such I see, that all for pittie I could die.<sup>28</sup>

It is not merely the diderence between the English decasyllabic and the Italian hendecasyllabic line, for the difference of movement appears even in Wyatt's *ottava rima*.

Love to gyve law unto his subject hertes  
Stode in the Iyes of Barsabe the bryght,  
And in a look anone hymselffe conuerthes  
Cruelly plesant byfore Kyng David syght;  
First dasd his Iyes, and forder forth he stertes  
With venemd breth, as softly as he myght,  
Towcht his sensis, and over ronnis his bonis  
With creping fyre, spasplid for the nonis.<sup>29</sup>

It is not too much to say that, however much Spenser may have been indebted to Tasso and Ariosto for inspiration, for subject

<sup>28</sup> Smith, J. C., *Spenser's Faerie Queene* (Oxford, 1909), Book I, Canto iii, stanza 1.

<sup>29</sup> Foxwell, A. K., *The Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (1914), p. 131. To make a fair comparison let us take examples from an English poet who wrote extensively and successfully in both forms—Lord Byron. And let us take examples from work done in similar moods, and in which he avoids the double rhymes usually employed by him:

Moons changing had roll'd on, and changeless found  
Those their bright rise had lighted to such joys  
As rarely they beheld throughout their round;  
And these were not of the vain kind which cloyes,  
For theirs were buoyant spirits, never bound  
By the mere senses, and that which destroys  
Most love, possession, unto them appear'd  
A thing which each endearment more endear'd.  
(*Don Juan*, Canto iv, stanza 16.)

Clear, placid Leman! thy contrasted lake,  
With the wild world I dwelt in, is a thing  
Which warns me, with its stillness, to forsake  
Earth's troubled waters for a purer spring.  
This quiet sail is as a noiseless wing  
To waft me from distraction; once I loved  
Torn ocean's roar, but thy soft murmuring  
Sounds sweet as if a Sister's voice reprov'd,  
That I with stern delights should e'er have been so mov'd.  
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto iii, stanza 85.)

matter, and for the polishing of his versification, there is hardly a verse form that would have fitted his genius less than *ottava rima*. That he never handled it among the many forms he used in his minor poems is surely a highly significant fact.<sup>30</sup>

The strongest case so far made out for an Italian derivation for Spenser's stanza is that advanced by Miss Pope in favor of *terza rima*.<sup>31</sup> In it she does not discuss either rime royal or *ottava rima*, but argues against the Monk's Tale octave, as has been noted. She urges (justly as it seems to me) that "the partial correspondence of rhyme scheme between the double quatrain of Chaucer and the stanza of Spenser is a coincidence",<sup>32</sup> but I am unable to agree about her suggestion with regard to *terza rima*.

She admits that among the hundreds of Italian madrigals which nearly approximate Spenser's scheme, and which are based upon *terza rima*, no exact counterpart has been found.<sup>33</sup> She cites madrigals with the rhyme schemes aba/aac/add, aba/bcb/cc and aba/cdc/ded/e; and the second of these she manipulates so that *a, b, a, b, c, b, c, c* has a line added and a line transposed to make *a, b, a, b, b, c, b, c, c*.<sup>34</sup>

But in this she argues along just the same lines as the advocates of *ottava rima* as the basis of the Spenserian stanza. If Spenser, as she says, rejected the idea of imitation of *ottava rima* as beneath his dignity,<sup>35</sup> why should he not have rejected *terza rima* for the same reason? But that question really is beside the point, for in any event Spenser concealed his indebtedness well enough to have set people arguing about it for a couple of centuries. The fact which

<sup>30</sup> The significance of this is increased when we remember that the *Prothalamion* and the *Epithalamion* are adaptations—and it is unnecessary to say highly successful ones—of the Italian *canzone*.

<sup>31</sup> *Loc. cit.*, pp. 31-53.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>34</sup> Luigi Alamanni in his *Satira X*, has a rhyme scheme *a, b, a, b, c, b, c, b, c* which is copied by Wyatt. George Saintsbury calls this "intertwined decasyllables" (*History of English Prosody*, I, 311-312). It is really a sort of *terza rima*, though there is hardly room enough in a nine-line stanza to give the *terza rima* effect. (This Shelley perceived in using his stanza of the *Ode to the West Wind*.) But though Wyatt's use of the form would not substantiate *terza rima* as the basis of the Spenserian stanza, it may be taken as another indication of the English poets before Spenser looking towards such a stanza.

<sup>35</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 52.

she brings forward that Spenser himself refers in one of his introductory sonnets to *The Faerie Queene* to his "rusticke madrigale" also strikes me as beside the point, for such terms, as Miss Pope herself confesses, were loosely used in England, and the madrigal was thought of in its relation to music rather than its relation to verse pattern <sup>36</sup>

Writing in favor of the Ferrers poem Grierson and Clark call Miss Pope's objections "rather strained", <sup>37</sup> and Millican also objects to her objections <sup>38</sup>

As, like them, I am committed to an English original for the Spenserian stanza (though not to the one they propose), it would be well to start with Ferrers, especially as on one occasion Spenser did employ the Kenilworth stanza. <sup>39</sup>

This poem, which was printed by George Gascoigne in *The Princely Pleasures at Kenelworth Casile*, <sup>40</sup> is in a six-line stanza with an alexandrine. The fact of the alexandrine does not exactly overwhelm me, for there had been previous instances of rime royal concluding in an alexandrine, which I shall mention later. However, it may be taken as very likely that Spenser had read this poem. And Greenlaw suggests, "Perhaps Spenser was present; he certainly knew about the pageant, and it might well have suggested some projects to him." <sup>41</sup> Which is a harmless supposition, if not quite necessary. What gives one pause is that the poem was on an Arthurian subject.

However, one need not pause too long on the coincidence. The form and not the subject of the poem is the important question. Spenser could as easily have derived his stanza from a poem about Montezuma as about Arthur, though we should allow for the complex of a poet's ideas and be ready to concede that when Spenser began to write *The Faerie Queene* this previous Arthurian poem,

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50

<sup>37</sup> Grierson, H. J. C. and Clark, A. M., "The Elizabethan Period: Poetry and Prose," *The Year's Work in English Studies*, VII (1926), 161.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Millican, Charles Bowie, *Spenser and the Table Round* (Cambridge, Mass., 1932), p. 119.

<sup>39</sup> But only as the concluding stanza of *January* in *The Shepheardes Calender*.

<sup>40</sup> Cunliffe, John William, *The Complete Works of George Gascoigne* (Cambridge, 1910), II, 93-94.

<sup>41</sup> Greenlaw, Edwin, "Spenser's Fairy Mythology," *Studies in Philology*, xv (1918), 106.

along with a number of other things, may have been at the back of his mind. And really, when all is said and done, the only Arthurian stanzas of Ferrers are those which Millican quotes (the second and the last) of a poem only 42 lines long. I quote the fourth:

For straight by Danes and Normans all this Ile  
     was sore distrest, and conquered at last.  
 Whose force this Castle felt, and I therewithile,  
     did hide my head, and through it straightway past  
 Unto Lord *Sentloes* hands, I stode at bay:  
     and never shewed my selfe, but stil in keepe I lay,<sup>42</sup>

The rest is no better. The poem does have a concluding alexandrine to each stanza. It does allude twice (in passing) to King Arthur. But it is hard to believe that Spenser would have remembered such poor stuff, and harder still to believe that he took his stanza pattern from it.

Nevertheless I am very willing to concede that this poem may be added to those whose pattern adumbrated the Spenserian stanza.

Lacking positive evidence to the contrary, it is reasonable to suppose that Spenser would have been more likely to have picked up the hint he needed for the pattern of his stanza from an English rather than a foreign model. *Ottava rima*, like *terza rima*, is less like the Spenserian stanza than the ballade octave. This, however, I reject also, for reasons already stated.

My suggestion is that the Spenserian stanza had been, as it were, in the air for a long time before Spenser reduced it to actuality. This, I admit, I cannot prove beyond doubt. But I can produce evidence in support of my belief.

Before I do so, however, let us glance for a moment at what occurred after the invention of the pattern of *The Faerie Queene*. So far from Spenser's contemporaries accepting his stanza—that was left to the Romantic poets and their forerunners—they went scurrying about to see if they could discover something else of the same sort.<sup>43</sup> They saw clearly enough that the alexandrine had

<sup>42</sup> Cunliffe, J. W., *op. cit.*, II, 94.

<sup>43</sup> Morton, E. P., *loc. cit.*, pp. 643-644, notes "Spenser's stanza was certainly not much used by his contemporaries. The only instance I have found is a poem of nineteen stanzas published in January, 1595, and called 'Cynthia.' Its author,

something to do with Spenser's success, though they had not quite wit enough to see exactly what that was. Therefore they tried their own hands at the trick. If Spenser had hit upon a poetic goldmine, perhaps they could too—with a little luck. Phineas Fletcher (1582-1650) in his *Second Eclogue* invented a stanza rhymed *ababb*, the last line an alexandrine. Giles Fletcher (1588?-1623) used *ababbccc* (again the last line an alexandrine) in his *Christ's Victory and Triumph*. (And this, by the way, is only rime royal with an added alexandrine.) John Donne (1573-1631) in *The Good Morrow* uses *ababccc* in the hope that somehow or other a stanza terminating in an alexandrine would rival Spenser's.<sup>44</sup> But all these were, of course, failures when compared with Spenser's achievement. And this is true even of Milton's fine early poem *On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough*.

O fairest flower no sooner blown but blasted,  
Soft silken Primrose fading timeleslie,  
Summers chief honour if thou hadst out-lasting  
Bleak winters force that made thy blossome drie;  
For he being amorous on that lovely die  
That did thy cheek envermeil, thought to kiss  
But kill'd alas, and then bewayl'd his fatal bliss.<sup>45</sup>

This, however, is much better than many similar experiments because it merely concludes rime royal with an alexandrine, making it at least organic. But though the alexandrine here offers no violence, it is unneeded and adds nothing to the form even if it does not obviously detract from it. So much cannot be said for the other *quasi*-Spenserian stanzas.

Milton's stanza (whether or not he was aware of the fact) was identical with that of Giles Fletcher. And Fletcher in turn was pre-

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Barnefield, says in his preface that it is 'the first imitation of the verse of that excellent poet, Maister Spencer, in his *Fayrie Queene*.' Harko Gerrit de Maar, however, in his *History of Modern English Romanticism* (Oxford, 1924), lists twelve poems written in the Spenserian stanza during the seventeenth century (p. 238). De Maar, in the same book (pp. 33-36), notes some seventeenth century comments on the Spenserian stanza (including the well-known one by Ben Jonson), and most of these are hostile. But one may suspect a certain amount of professional jealousy.

<sup>45</sup> For later experiments along these lines see Schipper, J., *History of English Versification*, pp. 359-360.

<sup>46</sup> Patterson, F. A., *Milton's Complete Poems* (New York, 1930), *On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough*, stanza 1.



ceded by Sir Thomas More who has a rime royal poem of twelve stanzas with a refrain (which would suggest a ballade intention). The concluding line of the stanza is not invariably an alexandrine.<sup>46</sup> One stanza may be given as a sample.

Adew lord Henry my lovyng sonne adew.  
Our lorde encrease your honour and estate,  
Adew my doughter Mary bright of hew.  
God make you vertuous wyse and fortunate.  
Adew swete hart my litle doughter Kate,  
Thou shalt swete babe suche is thy desteny,  
Thy mother never know, for lo now here I ly.<sup>47</sup>

Even in such a poem (though less here than in others) there was a perhaps unconscious incipience of the Spenserian stanza. In it too we see how, though the majority of poets since the appearance of rime royal were content to use nothing else, some of them were obviously trying to develop a new pattern out of it. That they did not succeed need not trouble us. The important thing is the tendency in the Spenserian direction.

This tendency can be seen beginning very early. Indeed I should want to trace the tendency from Chaucer himself. Having used the octave and the ballade and rime royal, he made elaborations upon the last of these. It would be too much to say that he was consciously and deliberately trying to discover a new stanza pattern; but his experiments at least would indicate that he thought a new pattern possible. Perhaps it might be put in this way: he may have felt that such a pattern existed ideally, could he only find it—just as Michelangelo, according to the pleasant story, used to say that the statue was already in the marble; the function of the sculptor being merely that of liberating it.

Every true verse pattern is a discovery rather than an invention. The poet does not arbitrarily arrange his metres and his rhymes—for such a method of procedure, being merely artificial, would result indeed in an infinite number of forms, but in forms that would have no real existence, since they would be the product of in-

<sup>46</sup> Campbell, William Edward, *The English Works of Sir Thomas More* (London and New York, 1931), I, 335-337.

<sup>47</sup> But as this occurs only at the end (when it does occur) the substitution of a decasyllabic line may be supposed to have been an oversight. More was not a very skilful poet.

genuity and not of genius. Yet it is by experiment that such things are discovered. There is the element of accident in the matter; there is also the element of intuition. The poet does not know quite what it is that he is looking for until he has stumbled upon it; but he has an inkling of what it is.

This is no hypothesis spun out of my own head. The case of Keats's ode pattern has been mentioned, and if space permitted others could be produced. Indeed, the most striking instance of it is found in the formation of the Spenserian stanza.

In an earlier chapter I have suggested that the ten-line stanza used (among others) by Chaucer in *A Complaynt to his Lady* and rhyming *aabaabccddc* might have been influenced by the sonnet pattern. Yet that suggestion (even if securely founded) does not invalidate its inclusion in the list of stanzas that possibly foreshadow the rich ornateness of Spenser's stanza. In the same way the *envoi* of *The Complaynt of Venus*, the solitary example in Chaucer of a stanza rhyming *aabaabbaab*, might be added.

But we are on firmer ground when we come to the stanza of *The Complaynt of Mars*:

The ordre of complaynt requireth skilfully,  
That if a wight shal pleyne pitously,  
Ther mot be cause wherfor that men pleyne;  
Or men may deme he pleyneeth folily  
And causeles; alas! that am not I!  
Wherfor the ground and cause of al my peyne,  
So as my troubled wit may hit ateyne,  
I wol reherse; not for to have redresse,  
But to declare my ground of hevinesse.<sup>48</sup>

That is clearly rime royal with an embroidered fringe. The pattern is merely *a (a) ba (a) bbcc*. A somewhat similar stanza (which comes close also to that used in *A Complaynt to his Lady*) is used in *Anelida and Arcite*, a few stanzas of which are further complicated by internal rhyming, and in *Womanly Noblesse* where it is used for the ballade purpose.<sup>49</sup> And though in all this Chaucer must have had in mind the various elaborations upon the octave which the French writers of ballades permitted themselves, I sug-

<sup>48</sup> 155-163.

<sup>49</sup> These stanzas must be regarded as rime royal with variations introduced by way of enrichment.

gest that as he moved away from the ballade restrictions—and in proportion to the distance he moved away—he was unconsciously but certainly moving towards the discovery culminating in Spenser.

The nine-line stanza used by Dunbar in *The Goldyn Targe* has been cited. The same stanza was used by Gavin Douglas in *The Palice of Honour* (though he has also the variant given below)<sup>50</sup> and by Henryson in *The Testament of Cressid*.<sup>51</sup> It is rhymed *aabaabbab* and is the pattern of *Anelida and Arcite* and *Womanly Noblesse*. Lindsay's *Epistil to the Redar* in his poem *To the Mon-arche* is nothing but the Compleynt of Mars stanza. But Lindsay, by using it more extensively than Chaucer ever did, showed that he had a keen sense of its possibilities.

And Prince of Preistis in this Natioun.  
Efter Reuerend Recommendatioun,  
Under thare feit thow lawlye the submit,  
And mak thame humyll supplicatioun,  
Geue thay in the fynd wrang Narratioun,  
That thay wald pleis thy faltis to remyt:  
And of thare grace, geue thay do the admyt,  
Than go thy waye quhare euer thow plesis best:  
Be thay content, mak reuerence to the rest.<sup>52</sup>

The stanza chosen has no poetic merit and is exhibited merely for the sake of the form. Lindsay can do better in it. But this stanza (Miss Pope, who does not mention that it was used by Chaucer, calls "an interesting form of *terza rima*."<sup>53</sup> And again I might draw

In that mirrour I micht se at ane sicht,  
The deidis and fatis of euerie eirdlie wicht,  
All thingis gone like as thay war present,  
All the creatiounis of the angellis bricht,  
Of Lucifer the fall for all his micht,  
Adam first maid and in the eirth ysent,  
And Noyes flude thair saw I subsequent,  
Babylon beild, that towre of sic renoun,  
Of Sodomes the feill subuersioun.

Small, John, *The Poetical Works of Gavin Douglas* (Edinburgh and London, 1874), I, 57.—Is there not in that, in addition to a stanza strongly suggestive of Spenser, something that suggests, equally strongly, the movement of Spenser's verse?

<sup>50</sup> 407-469.

<sup>51</sup> Hamer, Douglas, *The Works of Sir David Lindsay*, I, 199.

<sup>52</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 44.

attention to the stanza of Alexander Scott.<sup>54</sup>

That these forms were directly taken, or else derived from Chaucer, strengthens rather than weakens my case. The Scottish Chaucerians, more clearly than Chaucer himself, and still more clearly than their English contemporaries, felt in their bones the need that English poetry had for stately and elaborate versification. Which is to say that they were travelling towards Spenser.

I do not wish to press this too far. Indeed, I dare not. What the conscious intention of these men was we do not know. Possibly (indeed probably) they were actuated by mere instinct. But it is impossible for me to read such strophes without feeling that those who wrote them were on the verge of a discovery, which they were not quite gifted enough to make. They could not put the finishing touch to the Spenserian stanza. Meanwhile most of their fellows went on using rime royal in an entirely mechanical fashion, and indeed they themselves used rime royal. It was the basis of practically all their work.

The day of the Renaissance dawned in England. Poets continued to use rime royal, but to it they added other forms, some invented by themselves, others imported from Italy. Out of the tremendous new stimulation came the Spenserian stanza. But preceding the discovery of that stanza went several abortive attempts to discover it.

The rime royal stanza of Sir Thomas More with a concluding alexandrine has been noted. So also has the instance of the Ferrers stanza, upon which so much stress has been laid in certain quarters. We now have to consider several other possible prototypes of Spenser's stanza.

In a very interesting contribution to the *Review of English Studies*<sup>55</sup> Bradner instances two stanzas from *Tottel's Miscellany*. He also raises objections to Miss Pope's suggestion that Spenser picked up the hint he needed from the Italian madrigal, pointing out that the normal length of the Italian line does not provide her with any useful parallels; that *The Shepheardes Calender*, "that store-house of Spenser's early experiments, contains no hint at a nine-line stanza, nor do we find any eight-line stanzas of the mad-

<sup>54</sup> Previously given on p. 103 of this work.

<sup>55</sup> Bradner, Leicester, "Forerunners of the Spenserian Stanza," *Review of English Studies*, IV (1928), 207-208.

rigal type cited by Miss Pope." The idea of the medial *b* rhyme in his stanza he admits "almost certainly came to him from the similar couplet in the rime royal of his beloved Chaucer," and he adds "It is thus evident that two of the three peculiarities of Spenser's stanza, namely, the medial couplet and the final couplet, may have come to him from native sources, aided by his own ingenuity"<sup>56</sup>

The two poems to which he refers as possible sources of the Spenserian stanza follow:

Since thou my ring mayst goe where I ne may  
 Since thou mayst speake where I must hold my peace  
 Say vnto her that is my lues stay  
 Grauen the within which I do here expresse:  
 That sooner shall the sonne not shine by day,  
 And with the raine the floodes shall waxen lesse.  
 Sooner the tree the hunter shall bewray,  
 Then I for change or choyce or other loue,  
 Do euer seke my fansy to remoue

\* \* \* \* \*

The golden apple that the Troyan boy,  
 Gaue to Venus the fayrest of the thre,  
 Which was the cause of all the wrack of Troy,  
 Was not receiued with a greater ioye,  
 Then was the same (my loue) thou sent to me,  
 It healed my sore it made my sorowes free,  
 It gaue me hope it banisht mine annoy:  
 That happy hand full oft of me was blist,  
 That can geue such a salue when that thou list.<sup>57</sup>

Though it seems to me very improbable that Spenser should have derived the idea of his stanza from two isolated scraps of verse—scraps, too, which are far from exhibiting assured workmanship—I am of course happy to accept these as further indications of the unconscious trend towards the Spenserian stanza. It should be again emphasized that Bradner merely offers these instances for what they are worth. He seems to hold as firmly as I ~~do that Spenser's main indebtedness was to Chaucer.~~

To the instances Bradner has brought forward let me add another from the same source. Though it has eleven lines instead of

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>57</sup> Rollins, Hyder E., *Tottle's Miscellany* (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), I, Nos. 203 and 231.

nine, I should regard it as pointing, together with the others, in the direction of Spenser.

Bewaile with me all ye that haue profest,  
Of musicke tharte by touche of coarde or winde:  
Laye downe your lutes and let your gitterns rest,  
Phillips is dead whose like you can not finde.  
Of musicke much exceedyng all the rest,  
Muses therfore of force now must you wrest.  
Your pleasant notes into an other sounde,  
The string is broke, the lute is dispossest,  
The hand is colde, the bodye in the grounde.  
The lowring lute lamenteth now therfore,  
Phillips her frende that can her touche no more.<sup>58</sup>

These instances show that there was a feeling abroad for the Spenserian stanza, and that that feeling had existed for more than a hundred years. Though the genius of Spenser needed the instrument of the Spenserian stanza for its perfect fulfilment, the genius of poetry also needed it, and somebody else might have been expected to have hit upon the pattern had Spenser not done so.

That, however, is speculative. What can be shown, with moral though not absolute certainty, is that Spenser was led towards his discovery by his acceptance of the hint provided by rime royal and his understanding of that hint. Let us have examples of the two forms for comparison, examples which have been selected for self-evident reasons.

The bilder ook, and eek the hardy asshe;  
The piler elm, the cofre unto careyne;  
The boxtree piper; holm to whippes lasshe;  
The sayling firr; the cipres, deth to pleyne;  
The sheter ew, the asp for shaftes pleyne;  
The olyve of pees, and eek the drunken vyne,  
The victor palm, the laurer to devyne.<sup>59</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

The Laurell, meed of mightie Conquerours  
And Poets sage, the Firre that weepeth still,  
The Willow worne of forlorne Paramours,  
The Eugh obedient to the benders will,  
The Birch for shaftes, the Sallow for the mill,  
The Mirrhe sweete bleeding in the bitter wound,

<sup>58</sup> Rollins, H. E., *Tottel's Miscellany*, 1, No. 209.

<sup>59</sup> *Parlement of Foules*, pp. 176-182.

The warlike Beech, the Ash for nothing ill,  
 The fruitfull Oliue, and the Platane round,  
 The caruer Holme, the Maple seeldom inward sound.<sup>60</sup>

Obviously Spenser had this particular stanza of Chaucer's in mind when he composed the one just quoted. But we do not need these examples to prove the relationship between the two forms. The stanzas are exhibited as examples of their structural similarity, and also because they show plainly the difference in scope between the two patterns.

The *Four Hymns*, too, as Spenser himself tells us, were written in "the greener times" of his youth. They are all in rime royal, for having begun the series in that stanza, the poet naturally completed the last two in the same, for the sake of uniformity. But even after the stanza of *The Faerie Queene* had been achieved, Spenser occasionally went back to rime royal, as in *The Ruines of Time* and the *Daphnaida*. In the latter poem, however, he modified the pattern and arranged his rhymes *ababcb*. His direct borrowing of patterns was not of great extent: there are among these a few madrigal stanzas and a sestina.<sup>61</sup> Even his sonnet pattern is of his own devising. His most extensive direct borrowings of stanza pattern are from Chaucer. And this would suggest that his main indirect borrowing (which was an astounding modification of an old form) was from the same source.

His praise of Chaucer is familiar to everybody. But one stanza of it should be quoted again, for it suggests rather more than that Spenser merely admired his predecessor, or that he was in a general way inspired by him. It seems to me to be an admission that he was a follower of Chaucer, not only in spirit, but in metrical design.

Then pardon, O most sacred happie spirit,  
 That I thy labours lost may thus reuiue,  
 And steale from thee the meede of thy due merit,

<sup>60</sup> Smith, John Cruickshanks, *Spenser's Faerie Queene* (2 vols., Oxford, 1909), Book 1, Canto 1, Stanza 9.

<sup>61</sup> De Sélincourt, Ernest, *Spenser's Minor Poems* (Oxford, 1910), *August of The Shepheardes Calender*. Legouis, Emile, is concerned with Spenser's indebtedness to Chaucer as a metrist rather than to Chaucer the inventor of rime royal. Cf. *Quomodo Edmundus Spenserius ad Chaucerum se fingens in eclogis "The Shepheardes Calender" versum heroicum renovavit ac refecerit* (Paris, 1896), pp. 13, 21 et passim.

That none durst euer whilest thou wast aliue,  
 And being dead in vaine yet many striue:  
 Ne dare I like, but through infusion sweete  
 Of thine owne spirit, which doth in me suruiue,  
*I follow here the footing of thy feete,*  
 That with thy meaning so I may the rather meete.<sup>62</sup>

It might in conclusion be noted that, having invented his stanza, which fitted his poetic material like a glove, Spenser could rarely get away from it, even on those occasions when his stanza did not fit what he was dealing with. I am referring, of course, to his sonnets, which for the most part rhyme *ababbcbccdcdee*. They are written like that because the pattern of his stanza had become part of the texture of his mind. Add a foot to the ninth line of his sonnets, and discard the remaining five, and the result is a Spenserian stanza.

The Spenserian sonnet is admittedly a failure, and for reasons too well known to need recapitulation here. But it is a failure because the Spenserian stanza is a triumph, a triumph so overwhelming as to result in the imposition of a tyranny.<sup>63</sup>

Some of the sonnets are rhymed, for their first seven lines, like the *Daphnaida*. If, therefore, the Spenserian stanza is based upon rime royal, and the Spenserian sonnet on the Spenserian stanza, so from the Spenserian sonnet derives by a round-about process the *quasi* rime royal of the last-named poem.

<sup>62</sup> Smith, J. C., *Spenser's Faerie Queene*, Book IV, Canto ii, Stanza 34.

<sup>63</sup> This is strikingly exemplified by the fact that the sonnet *Ye tradefull Merchants, that with weary toyle* (No. xv of the *Amoretti*) is a close translation of one by Desportes. (*Diane*, I, xxxii.) But though the French original follows the Italian mode, Spenser cannot avoid imposing upon the content of Desportes his own characteristic form.



## SUMMARY

I HAVE tried to show here the connection between the ballade, rime royal and the Spenserian stanza.<sup>1</sup> This has involved a preliminary survey of Medieval Latin, Old French, and of Anglo-Saxon verse.

With the decay of the ancient aristocratic literature of imperial Rome, there appeared, derived from the provinces, a Celtic spirit in that literature even before its decline, and afterwards a reversion to the original tendencies of Latin verse. These, which had been repressed by classic Latin (a mode of expression modelled upon Greek, and therefore somewhat unnatural to it and artificial) had always been present in vulgar speech, which now came more and more into its own. The Church, by force of circumstances, not from choice, took the lead in this development. Her hymns inclined to the accentual and away from the quantitative system; and rhyme, which had always been inherent in Latin, appeared in them as quantity disappeared. Indeed rhyme, which was further stimulated by being crossed with the ingenious talent of the Irish, became a prime factor in the change from quantitative to accentual verse. The sequences of the Church were now taken over by secular poets; and the Goliards, exploiting liturgical forms in their own fashion, by uniting them to popular folk-song, prepared the way for the emergence of the European vernaculars.

One vernacular, however—and the one we are most concerned with: Anglo-Saxon—retained its own characteristic prosody. The learned men of that race wrote indeed largely in Latin—both in prose and verse—but their own alliterative system was so distinct from it as to be unaffected by it. Anglo-Saxon poets therefore could keep in separate departments their Latin verse (whether quantitative or accentual) and their native prosody.

The coming of the Normans, however, established French in England, and French, gradually fusing with Anglo-Saxon, ac-

<sup>1</sup> It must be admitted that to prove this beyond any shadow of doubt we should need what is not in existence—a letter of Spenser's on the subject. In the passage from *The Faerie Queene* quoted on the preceding page Spenser comes, however, as close to admitting the derivation of his stanza from Chaucer as we have any right to expect.

complished what Latin had been powerless to affect: the breaking down of the Anglo-Saxon alliterative prosody, and the substitution for it of French versification, which had been derived from medieval Latin. The attempted revival of the Anglo-Saxon system by Langland and others in the fourteenth century showed that the system had to be considerably modified to be used at all; and, after Chaucer had done his work, it was demonstrated to be obsolete. Such fifteenth-century specimens as exist usually combine alliteration and rhyme. The versification of Chaucer was unmistakably French, whatever signs it may have shown of being affected by the Germanic elements in the English language.

Of all the French forms the most important to Chaucer's development was that of the ballade. This he took over from Machaut, Deschamps and Froissart; but he reduced to simplicity what they had tended to make more and more elaborate. His seven-line heroic stanza rhymed *ababbcc* can, however, be found as a variant fairly often among the French writers of ballades, and even among Provençal poets. But despite the existence of precise prototypes of Chaucer's ballade stanza, he is entitled to the full credit of freeing that stanza (and also the ballade octave) from the restrictions of the ballade, and of making out of the former rime royal.

By the time Chaucer first went to Italy he had already invented rime royal. It is clear, therefore, that this stanza was not a modification of *ottava rima*. From Italy, Chaucer, as I have shown, took no new verse form, though to his study of the Italian poets he may well have been indebted for his increasing mastery over the heroic line, though not for the line itself. And it should be said that before going to Italy he (and a little later Gower, who gives no indication of having been affected by Italy), showed a disposition to use a greater freedom with regard to the caesura than French poets permitted themselves. What Chaucer derived from Italy was a broader outlook, intellectual stimulation, and subjects worthy of his genius. His heroic couplets, developed some time after his contact with Italy, probably came from a French source, but they had long been implicit in English verse, and, indeed, a few specimens of heroic couplets (though imperfect) can be instanced even before Chaucer's time.

A striking fact is that Chaucer avoided all use of the Italian forms of *ottava rima*, *terza rima*, and the sonnet, though he trans-

lated into rime royal or the *ababbcbc* octave Italian poems in all these forms. To the end of his life he employed the ballade pattern for his occasional poems, and his versification remained primarily based upon—though improving upon—his French models.

A confusion arose after his death with regard to the ballade. Though the Chaucerian form for this species of poem was often employed (and even occasionally the strict French form) it tended to become identified with rime royal, which was known as *ballade* or *ballade royal*. The term *rime royal* was first used by the Elizabethan poet and critic, Gascoigne. Its attribution to the fact that King James I of Scotland used rime royal is of recent date and is wholly fallacious. The proper term would be the Chaucerian stanza.

This stanza dominated English poetry for more than a hundred years far more completely than the polished antithetical heroic couplet dominated the eighteenth century. It was usually written mechanically, and hardly an English poet showed any disposition to use any other verse pattern. This lack of initiative, however, served a useful purpose: it preserved rime royal as a poetic tradition until the sixteenth century. The heroic couplet was rarely employed, and never with mastery during this time.

The Scottish Chaucerians, while relying in the main upon rime royal, employed, as I have shown, now and then the more elaborate variations upon the form which Chaucer had occasionally used, and by modifying these modifications still further, and by using them with increasing frequency, indicated (as even Chaucer had faintly done) their perception of the need for a longer, richer, more elaborate stanza based upon rime royal. Even the extravagances of Skelton, which seem to point in a different direction, may possibly indicate more than a dissatisfaction with rime royal (which he, like the rest, used). There are reasons for believing that Skelton, like other poets of his age, was feeling his way towards the Spenserian stanza.

In the Elizabethan age we still find rime royal. But we find, as early as Sir Thomas More, rime royal used with a concluding alexandrine. And more and more clearly we discover poets reaching towards a stanza which, though based (as was inevitable) upon rime royal, approximated towards the Spenserian stanza. Yet when that stanza was at last discovered, its significance was not

appreciated; indeed it was often disparaged. Nevertheless, seventeenth-century poets tried to invent a new stanza terminating in an alexandrine. It is clear that they failed to perceive that perfect unity had already been achieved. Not until the time of the Romantic Movement was the symmetrical beauty of the Spenserian stanza fully acknowledged.

That symmetry and unity make me reject the suggestions that the Spenserian stanza is either *ottava rima* (with an added internal line) or is based upon *terza rima*, or is a modification of the madrigal (which has a different line), or is even the Chaucerian octave with an alexandrine tacked on. The evidence offered in this study is that the Spenserian stanza grew naturally, and inevitably, from a native stock, which, though ultimately derived from the French ballade, was employed only in England: rime royal.

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# 134 BALLADE, RIME ROYAL, AND SPENSERIAN STANZA

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